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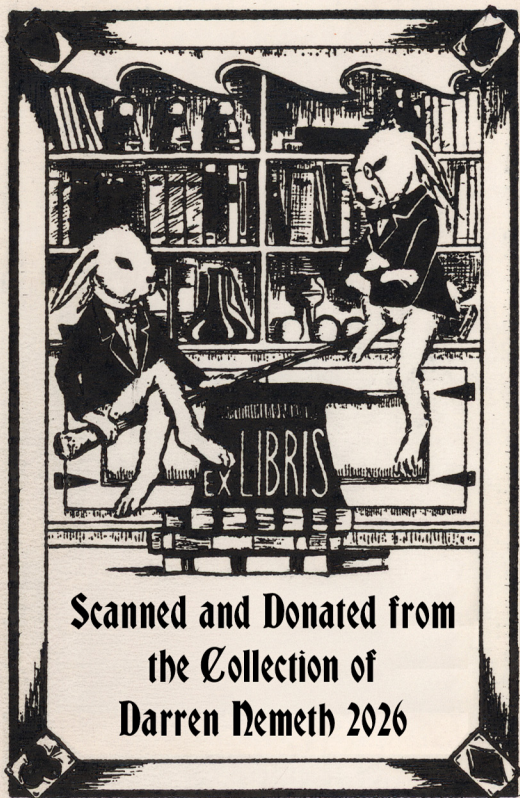
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THE LEAGUE OF FOUR

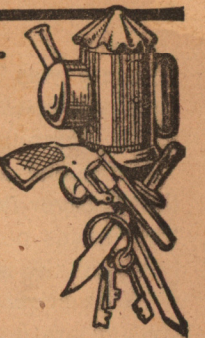


THE
ARTHUR WESTBROOK
COMPANY
CLEVELAND
U. S. A.

by
"OLD
SLEUTH"



OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY



A Series of
**THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES
EVER PUBLISHED**

No. 134

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VOL. III

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THE LEAGUE OF FOUR

OR

The Trail of the Man Tracker

BY OLD SLEUTH

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

DETECTIVE "JIM" CRAWLEY—One of the most experienced and resourceful sleuths known to the profession, truly a "man of many faces," who seldom fails to get the game he goes after, no matter how long the trail, or how dangerous. Until he was called into consultation with the New York police authorities the notorious band of criminals known as the "League of Four" laughed at the efforts of the plainclothes men to stop their bold depredations. Hardly a week passed, but some country house along the Sound, belonging to a wealthy New Yorker, was entered and virtually gutted of its treasures. But when Detective Jim took hold the death knell of this confederacy of crooks was sounded. They knew it too, and bore him a bitter hatred because of his spoiling their game that had already yielded them swag to the tune of a quarter of a million.

HANDSOME HARRY—The acknowledged leader of the "Big Four," sometimes called the "king of crooks," who conducted his operations so skillfully that for years he had been able to snap his fingers under the noses of the police.

SIM, THE PENMAN—A clever artist with regard to "raising" checks, and forging signatures, and whose adroitness in these several lines made him a valuable member of the

gang, and helped to bring many a plum into the bag of the looters.

"FOXIE" JONES—Another prominent character in the league of crime, and whose crafty nature made him capable of filling the shoes of the leader in time of an emergency; this opportunity came on the occasion when Harry was locked in a cell in the Tombs, after being finally run to earth and caught with the goods on him by the "Never Fail Detective."

RED LEARY—The fourth of the notorious clique, a gun-fighter who came from the West, and was always ready to take up a quarrel. He it was who declared that he had knocked out many a better man than Crawley, and gave the detective just a week to live after he took the war trail. But it turned out that even Red was not too old to learn new tricks.

PIETRO—An Italian junkman who found himself mixed up in the tangle, and came to the point of having a mighty close call on account of his fascination for an old Columbus urn.

ANNETTE—The young woman believed to be the daughter of the desperate leader of the gang, but whose better nature finally caused her to turn to the side of the sorely beset detective.

CHAPTER I.

A PRISONER OF THE GANG.

"By Heavens! I believe there are a thousand of the little devils, and that they mean to eat me alive!"

The man ended with a shout.

Truth to tell he had good reason for alarm.

Bound hand and foot he lay in a low, dungeon-like sub-cellar.

A lighted lantern hung on a wooden peg that had been driven into the moisture-covered wall.

This light disclosed a terrible picture indeed, one well calculated to make the pulses thrill, and the heart beat like a trip-hammer.

There was an army of rats around him, some of them sewer rats, half the size of a domestic cat.

They crawled out of crevices and holes in the walls.

It seemed as though the place were alive with a living, eager throng of sleek rodents, and all with their little heads pointed toward the helpless human being lying on the stone floor.

Shrill squeals attested to their hunger; and that strange grating noise sprang from the savage gritting of their sharp-pointed teeth.

Turn his head as he would the bound man saw an innumerable array of tiny sparks.

These were the glittering eyes of the rat horde.

At his sudden shout they scampered back with renewed squeals, angry squeals, as of animals that would not long be denied.

But anon they had advanced again, and grown bolder, even passed the invisible circling line that marked the high tide of their previous invasion.

"Get out!"

Again he shouted.

Once more the terrible array shrank back.

But they did not retreat quite so far.

Evidently they were gradually growing accustomed to the strange sound of a human voice.

Presently they would not mind it at all and then—

He shuddered at the thought of what would surely happen.

Detective Jim Crawley had been in many tough places during an experience extending over a score of years, but never had he faced a situation worse than the one that now confronted him.

He had been hot upon the track of the worst gang that cursed the great city of New York, and already landed one of its members behind the bars.

There were three others who managed to elude him in a most mysterious way; and finally, when he believed he was hot upon their trail a sudden blow upon the head had stolen his senses away.

He came to his right mind to find himself in this terrible position.

No assistance could possibly reach him here.

If he escaped at all it must be entirely through his own exertions.

He struggled with his lashings, but they had been well tied, and refused to give an inch.

Then he cast a last despairing look around the slimy place where his fiendish foes had thrown him.

He could see water oozing into the low dungeon, and from the signs he realized that with each high tide the rock-walled hole must be partly filled by the rising flood.

Plainly the three human devils had thrown him into this receptacle with the intention of having the hungry rats devour him; and if so be he escaped that fate then the slowly rising tide would finish him.

He struggled again with his bonds.

If he could only gain an inch there might be some hope; but alas, when he ceased, out of breath with his exertions, his wrists seemed to be just as tightly held together as at first.

Again he glared around.

It was the last despairing look of a man who believes he stands at the door of the other world.

This time he saw a box or two, water-soaked as though they had floated around in this foul hole for many moons.

Something glittered in a corner, something that was far too large to be the twin orbs of a vicious rat.

He stared, and then gave a cry that had a vein of hope in its ring.

What he saw was a broken bottle!

Perhaps it had once upon a time been smashed over the head of a drunken brawler; but to the detective it held out a bright prospect.

He rolled himself over and over twice until finally he drew up alongside the shining object that had caught his eye.

The rats followed his movements with eagerness, as though wondering what this strange object that had been placed at their disposal, meant to do.

Detective Jim managed to gain a sitting position.

Wriggling around he felt the keen edge of the glass with his bound hands.

All now depended on whether he could place that fragment in such a position that the stout cords binding his wrists might be sawed back and forth over its jagged teeth.

Even at the best it would take some minutes of time to cut through the cord.

And even seconds were very valuable just then.

He set to work with feverish energy.

What mattered it if the ragged edge of the glass did scratch and cut his tender skin, if only he could manage to saw the bonds to such a weak state that another frantic effort would burst them asunder.

Now the rats had apparently gotten over their curiosity, for once more they began to push up closer and closer, inch by inch, the leaders rubbing against each other as they advanced.

He was the hub of the wheel toward which every one of these hideous spokes pointed.

As he worked he sang and laughed and shouted—anything to distract the attention of that ferocious army, and cause them to hold back their attack.

Well he knew that if one leaped at his throat it would be the signal for dozens to follow suit, thinking they were about to be cheated out of their anticipated meal.

For the third time since commencing operations he stretched his wrists as far apart as the cord would allow.

It was giving.

One more effort and he would be free, so far as his hands went.

After that it would be but a minute ere he had sawn through those cords that held his ankles together for he could work so much faster then.

If only he could invent some new shout that would send those horrible pests scurrying back again, to give him one more chance.

It seemed to him that those in the van could not longer restrain their impatience, for they had the appearance of crouching for the fatal leap.

In a second he might feel the keen teeth of one fastened on his throat.

Desperation gave him the ingenuity to invent some new device, a shout or a movement of his lower limbs, that somehow caused the rat horde to temporarily shrink back.

They retreated but six inches, when the line tightened again, and once more the advance began, this time to a finish.

But just then his hands fell apart.

The broken glass had severed the rope.

He seized upon the friendly bit of bottle and began to saw back and forth across his ankles, meanwhile flourishing the other arm in a way calculated to deter the attack of his enemies for a brief time.

All the while Detective Jim kept up his shouts, although his voice was so hoarse he could hardly croak.

If the din were heard at all in the upper part of the house over this dungeon-like sub-cellar, the human fiends doubtless smiled at the thought that the enemy they had reason to fear above all others was fighting his last against the cannibal army of the sewers.

Now his feet were loose!

It was time.

One of the leading repulsive little beasts was just making a spring at his neck as the detective struggled to his feet, and it was only by a sudden fling of his arm that he sent the beast across the sepulcher.

It struck the opposite wall with a dull thud.

Instantly a score of its cannibal comrades had pounced on the unfortunate, and as by magic it vanished.

Others were by this time springing at the legs of the man and he was compelled to kick right and left in order to keep them away.

Some fastened to his garments with their sharp teeth, nor could they be dislodged by any frantic movement on his part.

Inch by inch they seemed to be climbing up, as if seeking to reach his face.

Detective Jim had seen one more thing when he cast that despairing glance around.

This was the trap through which he had evidently been cast into the foul pit.

It was in a corner of the vault almost over the lantern.

His head touch the flooring above as he stood erect, so scant were his quarters; but just then he had no fault to find.

To tell the truth this fact proved his salvation, for had the ceiling been above his reach he must have been pulled down by the number of furious rats that swarmed about his person, their keen teeth biting him in many places.

He made a rush for the corner, put up both his arms, and with a mighty heave threw aside the heavy trap, leaving a hole about two feet square.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE TIGER'S DEN.

There was not a second to lose.

Detective Crawley sprang forward, fastened his arms in the opening, and kicking with all his might, managed to dislodge the main body of furious little beasts that had swarmed over his lower limbs.

They sprang upward again and again in the endeavor to reach his disappearing form, and their squeals sounded like the grinding of car wheels on the steel rails.

No sooner had the man-hunter gained lodgment upon the floor above than he knocked several rodents down through the hole.

They had maintained their desperate hold in spite of his violent movements.

It was as though their teeth had become locked in the fabric of his garments, and only this last action on his part succeeded in dislodging them.

Around him was inky darkness.

He knew he was in a cellar of some sort, for a shaft of light came up through the open trap and fell upon a ceiling overhead.

That lantern would be of value to him now.

He bent down and looked through the gaping hole.

The whole stone floor seemed to be covered with a squirming sea of leaping rats the glittering eyes of which, turned up toward his place of refuge, looked like a wilderness of minute stars.

Some were swarming over the slimy walls in the mad attempt to gain the opening through which their expected prey had vanished.

His reappearance at the hole was greeted with a chorus of squeals, while the sleek gray-coated acrobats tried harder than ever to gain a lodgment far up the walls, where they had hope of reaching him.

The detective simply bent lower.

By stretching his arm to its utmost his groping fin-

gers closed over the wooden peg that was driven into a crack in the wall.

Six inches along this they felt until the round ring of the lantern was reached.

Another instant and he had taken it from its lodging and drawn it through the aperture that had served him as a means of salvation.

This done he calmly raised the heavy trap.

As it fell into place he shut out the terrible spectacle of that angry mob of hungry cannibals still jumping and fighting among themselves.

Detective Jim drew the first decent breath he had indulged in since finding himself in such a frightful predicament.

Of course his enemies would take it for granted that he was as good as a dead man.

They were possibly toasting his passage across the dark river at that very moment, and wishing him luck in the other world.

Some men would have thought only of escape from a house of horror, after such an experience.

Not so Crawley, the detective whose bravery and gallantry were known far and wide among the police circles of the East.

He believed that circumstances favored him in that he was now undoubtedly under the same roof with the three desperadoes whom he had so long been piping.

Unarmed as he was he determined to penetrate still further into their secrets, and learn just where their weak points lay.

Using the lantern he quickly found where a flight of stairs fell down from the floor above.

These he ascended.

They creaked under his weight, being old and infirm.

In that dreadful stillness each sound seemed to be like the report of a pistol to his strained hearing.

Three times he paused to listen.

All seemed silent above, and this gave him renewed hope.

So he finally reached a door, and turned the knob.

It gave to his touch.

Perhaps this was a fortunate thing, for his pockets had been cleaned out by the rascals into whose hands he had fallen, and hence he was in no shape to pick a lock, or otherwise practice the arts of his profession.

He blew out the lantern, lest its light betray him.

Another moment and he had left the cellarway, and was standing in what seemed to be a lower hall.

Now he could catch a sound of voices from some point above.

Apparently it was still night, and he did not believe he could have been very long in his prison cell below, else would those famished rats have made a meal of him long before.

It took a daring man to creep toward the stairs leading above, knowing as he did that his three bitter ene-

mies must be close by, and that he had not a single weapon on his person with which to defend himself.

Yet that was what Detective Jim did.

He reached the landing to which the stairs led, though to do so he had to fairly crawl alongside the banister, so that his progress might not be known to the keen ears of those wide-awake schemers.

Just as he gained this hall he heard a bell jangle.

Some one was at the outside door!

Then the sounds that had come to his ears as he climbed the stairs must indeed have been the chugging of a motor car outside.

This summons would undoubtedly bring one or more of the men out of the room in which they held their conference.

It spelled danger for him.

The instant the door opened a flood of light must fill the hall, and a crouching figure of a man would be instantly seen.

Detective Jim had provided against such an event.

His groping hand had come in contact with some hanging garments, possibly outer coats belonging to the lawless denizens of the crime headquarters.

One quick movement and he had reached the spot where they were suspended.

He thrust his figure among them, and just in time.

The person or persons outside had become impatient because no one answered the ring.

Again the insistent buzzing of the bell was heard.

At the same time a pair of knuckles beat a loud tattoo upon the panel of the door, framing a series of knocks that might even be a gang signal.

"Hello! hold on there, don't pound in the door. I'm coming!" sang out a harsh voice.

The door of the room was thrown open, and just as Crawley had anticipated a man came into view, bearing a lamp in his hand.

Peeping out from among the automobile coats and wraps he saw the fellow's face distinctly, since it was close to the light.

"Red Leary, for one!" muttered the detective grimly.

He knew now he was on the right track.

The strong-arm man's confederates, Sim, the Penman, and "Foxey" Jones, the clever crook who posed as a Wall-street magnate, and worked off the bad checks raised by the former, must be close at hand.

The man who carried the lamp walked straight to the outer door.

Before he unbarred it he called out again:

"Who is it knocks?"

"A pilgrim of the night," came the voice without.

"What d'ye want here?" continued the cautious crook, doubtless carrying out a code that was in use among the members of the gang.

"Admittance to the lodge," answered the unseen one, readily.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN IN THE COFFIN.

A dozen thoughts flew through the brain of the detective as he lay there, and glued his astonished eyes on that plain coffin.

Was this some cunning trick of these marauders?

Did they have plunder secreted inside that long box?

Few officers would suspect that crooks would be carrying swag away in such a strange receptacle.

If halted by any inquisitive officer they could easily produce a panic by declaring that they were taking the body of a man from the pest house.

The fear of catching some terrible contagious disease would deter the bravest bull from a desire to investigate, and he would be apt to send them on about their business in hot haste.

Already Red Leary had tools in his hands, and commenced work upon the closed lid of the coffin.

He ripped it up as though haste was an important thing just then in the programme.

The others clustered around.

Expectancy was written big upon their faces, as though some wonderful treasure might be drawn from the box when opened.

Had a bank been robbed, or some millionaire's treasure box broken open?

Detective Jim really expected to see a vision of flashing jewels and packages of bank bills, or possibly pecks of gleaming gold when the moment came for the gruesome box to deliver up its secret.

He was mistaken.

As soon as the lid had been dislodged he saw the men gather still closer, all eyes glued upon what rested within.

"Take hold and lift!" exclaimed Red Leary, suiting the action to the word.

Others did likewise, and quickly under this impetus an object came into view.

It was the body of a man!

Then the coffin had been put to its proper use.

The detective had been astonished before.

He was amazed now, and forgot to even draw his breath as his startled eyes fell upon the white face of the figure these scoundrels were lifting from the box. For he knew it well.

Two days before he had talked with this man, and tried by every means possible to gain some information from him concerning the other members of the gang.

That had been in the Tombs, where the chief offender lay at the time charged with almost every manner of crime on the calendar.

And here he was dead, and far removed from the prison cell.

For Detective Jim knew that he was looking upon

"Give the pass word."

"Banes!"

"All right. That you, Billy?" asked the man, setting the lamp on the floor, and starting to unfasten the door.

"Sure. Open up."

The door was quickly ajar.

"What success—have you got it along?" demanded the strong-arm man; and it was apparent that he had a tremendous interest in the answer expected.

"Couldn't be better, pal."

"Then you've got it—tell me that?"

"We've been and done it, as sure as you live. Get the boys out to help carry it in. There's been too much time wasted already. Even now it may be too late. Chase yourself, Red. Con got hurt on the way, and is no good for lifting a heavy weight. 'Twas all he could do to run the other car behind."

Red Leary immediately turned and dashed into the room.

The concealed detective could hear the throbbing of not one but two motors outside, and he recognized an old trick of these clever rascals to use one vehicle for throwing any pursuers off the track.

At some appointed place they had come together again, and continued in company to the lonely house down by the water, where the gang had its headquarters, convenient to the Sound and the neighboring city.

"Out here, boys," he heard Red exclaim; "they're here, and brought it along. Billy says it's late and the risk grows as the minutes fly. Come on and give us a lift in."

When he appeared again there were two others at his heels, the very men whom Detective Crawley had sworn to lodge behind the bars, just as he had succeeded in doing with their notorious leader some weeks back.

They passed outside.

Taking advantage of their brief absence this daring man slipped through the door of the room, and finding a place to hide behind a sofa, sprawled out on the floor.

Hardly had he done so than he heard them returning.

They were puffing as though carrying a load.

"Here, right on these two horses will do, boys. Down with it!" said Leary.

Straining his sight and stretching his neck the concealed detective was able to see the object that they had carried into the place.

No wonder he started at what he saw.

No wonder he could hardly believe his eyes as he crouched there and stared.

It was no box of plunder as he had at first supposed.

His horrified eyes rested on a coffin.

the face of Handsome Harry, the most dangerous criminal in all his experience, and the man whom he had arrested after a long and perilous chase.

Apparently since he had spoken with him the notorious crook had "croaked," and the prison authorities, convinced that he was really dead, had given his body to some person who claimed it, perhaps one of his women associates who presented herself as the wife of the unfortunate prisoner.

But why had the body been brought here?

He scented an amazing plot, the like of which had never before been attempted so far as his knowledge went, outside of fiction.

Lying there he watched the movements of the men around the table on which the body of Handsome Harry had been placed.

Apparently all preparations had been made beforehand, for Sim, the Penman, had a bottle in his hands, with which he was saturating a handkerchief, which in turn was pressed over the nose of the corpse.

Meanwhile each of the others was busy under his directions, rubbing the arms and legs of the body.

It was the strangest sight the looker-on had ever seen, and he was thrilled by the excitement.

Indeed, he seemed to hold his very breath in suspense, under the fear that after all this astounding plot to defeat the ends of justice might fail.

It was so bold, so unparalleled that the detective could not keep from hoping that it would succeed.

He did not wish such a wonderful scoundrel to perish thus miserably.

"He moved!" cried Foxey Jones, suddenly.

"Sure?" demanded the slender wielder of the handkerchief, not ceasing his violent actions for a moment.

"Look! his fingers were shut, and now they are open. I tell you I saw his eyelid quiver. He's coming, boys! Keep it up!" declared Red, excitedly.

The man under the sofa breathed a low sigh of relief.

True, it meant that he would have all his work over with that clever law-breaker at large again; but better that than to see him meet such a fate.

Detective Jim forgot what the friends of Harry had tried to do to him when he allowed such generous thoughts to speed through his brain.

But it was true, and the man on the table did show signs of being about to return to life.

He had spent some years out in India, as the detective knew.

Perhaps it was there he had come across some magical preparation that would bring about a condition so closely resembling death that the shrewdest of doctors would be deceived.

At any rate it had apparently been done, for the evidence of it was there before the eyes of the detective.

In ten minutes he saw Handsome Harry sitting up on the edge of the table, taking a drink from a bottle.

He seemed as much alive as at any time in all his life.

Presently they had him seated in a comfortable chair.

Detective Jim wondered just why these crooks had gone to all this trouble and risk just to get a comrade out of the clutches of the law.

He believed there must be something more than loyalty back of it.

Something said by Foxey Jones first put him wise to the secret.

"Harry, they didn't get it away from you, did they?" he asked.

"I reckon not, old pal. They tried mighty hard though. That cursed sleuth Jim Crawley gave me no peace. He was up to all sorts of dodges to make me slip."

"He won't give you any more trouble. We caught him spying on this very house. He would have had the bunch of us in the strong box by another night."

"What did you do with him?" demanded the other, eagerly.

His expression was one of alarm as well.

"Chucked him down into the hole, tied hand and foot. Red says he heard some tall howling down there a bit back. I reckon the little wolves have torn him to pieces by now," responded Sim, grinning.

Handsome Harry started up, and then fell back again.

"I'm too weak to go, boys; but one of you must bring that devil back here. It's important, I tell you. Quick, don't lose another second!" he exclaimed.

The men stared at each other.

Here was a mystery indeed.

Why should their leader, just coaxed back from the border of the grave, desire the detective they hated brought up out of the vault which they had intended to make his tomb?

"But I said he was torn to pieces before now. A thousand men couldn't make him speak. Even that wonderful stuff you carried and with which we brought life back to you wouldn't work with a poor devil after those hungry rats had had him for ten minutes. It's too late now, Harry."

"Never mind. Get his clothes then!" shouted the excited man.

"We searched him from top to toe. He hasn't got a thing hidden on him."

"You don't know. I tell you he has our secret on his person!"

"Fiends and furies! how could that be?" cried the others in a chorus.

"Get his coat, I tell you! Before they searched me I saw him take it off, and left alone for a minute in the cell I slit the lining of his garment and concealed the paper there. All this time while he has been searching for a clue the fool has been carrying the secret around with him. He wondered why I laughed in his face

when he saw me a day or two back. I couldn't help it. Go down a couple of you, quick! Even if they have killed him perhaps the coat may be safe. Never mind the man; it's the garment we want!"

"Come along, Foxey, it's up to you and me!" shouted Red, making a break for the door.

The man under the sofa lay there.

He had just heard the most astounding piece of intelligence, and found it hard to credit his ears.

Eagerly his hand ran along the edge of his coat inside, and felt of the lining.

Ah! there was a little gap in it, and close by he felt what seemed to be a stiff object, very small, as though the bit of paper were meagre enough.

Then it must be true.

More than ever now did he wish to make his escape from the house.

If he had in his possession the secret which he had been so long trying to force from Handsome Harry, there remained no reason why he should longer remain in such extreme peril, if an opportunity sprang up whereby he could escape.

The two men had been gone now some five minutes.

Ere twice that time had elapsed they would have made a surprising discovery, and appear in the room with intelligence calculated to throw the gathered crooks into a spasm of rage and fear.

He dared not show himself.

There were still four to one, counting the man who had escaped from prison by means of the most cunning trick ever known.

Besides, he did not have a single weapon.

All he could do was to lie low.

No one would think of looking for him in that room at any rate, since they had been occupying it all the time.

He heard a sound now.

It was coming closer and closer, and to all appearances seemed to be the voice of Red Leary raised in alarm.

Then a thunderbolt burst in at the door.

It was the strong-arm man, and he was exclaiming over and over as though he could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes:

"He's gone! He's escaped again. He's the devil's own son! We're given the double cross this deal!"

CHAPTER IV.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

The greatest excitement ensued.

From the sounds the detective understood that Foxey Jones had followed close on the heels of the strong-arm man.

Above all the racket the clear voice of Handsome Harry sounded.

He was like a general calling upon his men to keep order.

"Silence!"

By degrees the signs of excitement died down.

"Now tell what you mean, Red. You looked into the vault?" asked the leader.

"Yes."

"What did you see?"

"Only a thousand jumping rats. They squealed at sight of my face as I held the lamp down the hole."

"Not a sign of the detective there?"

"Not a sign. I saw some cords. They were the ones we tied him with. And there was one other thing."

"Yes."

"A broken bottle."

"That tells the story. The clever rascal cut himself loose before the rats had a chance to make a meal off him. He has the nine lives of a cat. So you think he crawled up out of the hole then?"

"There ain't a single doubt about it."

"What makes you so sure? Perhaps the rats cleaned up every bit of him?"

"You know yourself that would be impossible, Harry. Besides—"

"Yes, go on, I'm listening."

"The lantern was gone—we left it hanging on the peg, you know."

"Gone? Then it does look like he gave us the slip. This is a serious matter, pals. That slick sleuth carries around with him our secret, even if he doesn't suspect it himself. Do you think he could have slipped out through one of the boarded-up cellar windows?"

"No, for he came up into the house," replied Leary.

"How do you know that?"

"We found the lantern on the upper cellar step as we came back, just where he must have left it."

"The same lantern, are you sure?"

"Why, the glass was even a bit warm, I tell you."

"That settles it. Then he must be somewhere about the house now. Perhaps he saw what you brought in, and knows that the dead has come to life!"

They stared at each other aghast.

"He must be found!" declared Sim the Penman, savagely.

"He will be found! And he shall never leave this place alive!" echoed Red.

"Scatter, boys. Take lights and search every foot of this shebang from attic to cellar. If you glimpse the skunk give him no chance to get away. A bullet will do it. And I'm going along with you to join in the hunt. Lock this door after we leave, so he can't get in here. No quarter to the cursed sleuth! This way, pals!"

They rushed from the room.

The man under the sofa chuckled as he heard a key grate in the lock.

That room was the only one in all the house where they believed the fugitive could *not* be hidden.

And yet, as we happen to know, he had had the nerve to slip in through the door at the time the occupants hurried away to carry in the strange burden of the motor car.

Detective Jim came out from behind the lounge.

He could hear his enemies rushing hither and thither through the house.

From the noise they made, and their excited cries, he imagined they were prying into every nook possible.

There came a sudden explosion!

Some one had fired a shot!

He hoped that a mistake had occurred and that one crook had put a piece of lead into another before he found out the truth.

The voices grew even louder, and it was evident that the false nature of the alarm had been discovered.

Detective Jim knew that he should be moving.

To linger meant new risks, and since he had learned what a valuable secret he was carrying in the lining of his coat he did not care to take any more chances than he could help.

The door was closed and locked.

That fact did not mean he was debarred from finding some way out of the place.

A window might give him the chance he sought.

No sooner did the thought come to him than he groped his way across the room, and reached the object he sought.

The sash persisted in making a creaking noise as he pushed it up; but by this time he was quite reckless.

Voices in the hall near by seemed to point to the fact that some of the men might be returning to the room.

In a few seconds they would be upon him, and he would have to turn and fight like a cornered rat.

The blinds were shut, and he fumbled for a few precious seconds at the fastenings before he could thrust them open.

Then he saw that he was some little distance from the ground, the old house being built on an abrupt slope.

To jump meant a chance for a sprain, which under the circumstances would prove a fatal thing.

He stretched out his hand.

Just as he hoped there was a waterpipe close by, running from the roof down to some waste drain below.

Of course it might be rotten with age.

No matter, he could not choose his method for reaching the ground with everything pushing him on.

A tumble would be no worse than jumping from the window.

Was that a key being thrust into the lock of the door?

If so there was indeed need of haste.

He hesitated no longer but swung himself off the ledge, having secured a grip on the pipe.

Contrary to his expectation it did not immediately give way under his weight.

A shout from the room he had left told that the one entering had glimpsed his figure just vanishing through the window.

That cry would of course bring all the others flocking to the scene, and he might expect a shower of bullets to follow after him.

He had slipped down a few feet when something happened.

There was a weak place in the pipe, and no sooner had he arrived at that spot than with a crash the whole fabric gave way.

Detective Crawley went smashing to the ground.

Fortunately he was not seriously hurt.

Hardly had he landed than he rolled over several times in order to confuse the aim of any one taking pot shots from above.

That was where he showed his wisdom, for hardly had he reached the bottom of the little bank than there was a bright flash above, accompanied by a sharp report.

"Get him?" asked a voice he recognized as belonging to Handsome Harry.

"I don't know. It's infernally black down there."

"Send in some more lead pills. Cover the spot where you think he landed. There will be the very devil to pay all round if he gets clear."

Red did as he was told, and fired three more times.

It was lucky for our hero that he did not happen to be lying where the broken water pipe had fallen.

The strong-arm man peppered that spot pretty thoroughly with his fire.

"Chase around and out by the front door! If you find him stiff down there it means safety for us! Let him once get away now and I tell you there will be the worst kind of a mix-up due. Jump away, boys!"

Handsome Harry was leaning out of the window.

If Detective Jim knew his methods he could easily guess that the leader of the gang had a pistol in his hand by now, and was watching keenly for some movement below.

And Harry was a clever shot too, as fine as could be found in New York.

He had proved it on numberless occasions, once under the eyes of the detective.

Still, it was up to Crawley to be moving.

Those other eager chaps would be out of the house in a jiffy, and once they arrived upon the scene it would really be too late for him to run.

Taking the chances he began to crawl away.

His movements might have been heard only for one thing.

One of the chauffeurs had not entered the house at the time the coffin was carried in.

He had been injured in the run somehow or other, and could only look after his car.

He was now engaged in turning his machine in the driveway, so that its head pointed toward the gate.

This fact attracted the attention of the detective, and a brilliant plan for giving his enemies the slip flashed through his brain.

He knew all about the running of a motor car, because he happened to own one himself.

Why not leap in, toss the crippled driver over the side, throw on power and spin out of the place, headed for safety?

Desperate cases require desperate remedies.

He did not take one second to figure over the matter.

That would have been the height of folly with those fierce ruffians rushing to the spot to accomplish his end.

Regardless of the several shots that sounded from the open window above, he dove in the direction of the leading motor-car.

The man on the seat, aroused by the shouts of warning, tried to stand up so as to meet the attack.

Detective Jim cleared the side of the car with one huge jump, and launched himself bodily on the fellow.

CHAPTER V.

THE HOT CHASE.

The man had little time in order to prepare for the attack.

One second he heard the voice of Handsome Harry shrieking out an alarm.

In another he found the athletic figure of the detective springing upon him.

He struck out.

His fist may have come in contact with the form of his antagonist; but the blow was too puny to be of any avail.

That which he received however, was like the piston stroke of a locomotive.

The impact impelled the chauffeur straight out of the car, landing him a yard or two beyond the edge of the drive.

He must have thought a mule had kicked him; or that he had run up against the revolving arm of a swiftly driven wind-mill.

Crawley did not stop to ascertain how badly the fellow was hurt.

Seconds counted for too much just then.

He seized upon the occasion to start the machine in motion, glancing back once to discover whether any of the gang had reached a point where they could interfere with his departure.

The car made a forward jump.

He had a glimpse of a man rushing in the direction of the second machine.

It was the other driver.

A second man crossed the bit of lawn with great strides, intending to cut him off and possibly leap aboard as he went by.

Detective Jim picked up a big wrench that chanced to catch his eye.

If he had one fair sweep with this at the fellow the State would be saved the expense of trying him.

But Foxey Jones was too shrewd a customer to permit himself to be caught in so primitive a trap.

He knew of a better way in which to get his man, he believed.

Stopping not ten feet away from the flying automobile he threw his hand forward.

Something was shining in his grip.

The astute detective ducked his head as he flew past, and the revolver blazed away not six feet from the side of the speeding car.

But for his quick move he must have received the bullet in his face.

Foxy Jones had been outwitted again!

Before he could shoot once more the machine had gone by, and while he sent a couple of bullets after it, this was more in the hopes of smashing one of the tires than hitting the elusive man who occupied the car.

When Crawley sped out of the gate circumstances controlled his course.

Going with the speed at which he had started he could only turn to the right.

To attempt anything else would prove disastrous, on account of the way in which the driveway opened upon the road.

Thus he was going away from the city as he sped on.

He had not gained much of a lead before he knew from the sounds in his rear that the second car was whirling along in hot pursuit.

Doubtless the men had piled aboard while the chauffeur was turning hastily; and he could take it for granted that he had a quartette of determined villains hustling along after him.

He wished he had his own car.

This one did not seem to be a very speedy machine, though as yet he had hardly given it a square chance to prove what it could do.

If he found those who pursued were overtaking him he would have to abandon the stolen car and trust to some other means for giving them the slip.

How he wished for a weapon just then.

They rushed along through the country like a couple of racing meteors.

The Vanderbilt cup race could not have shown greater speed than those two cars hit up after once getting well started down the grade.

The lamps gave but a feeble light ahead.

A turn might prove fatal to either one or both machines; yet neither of those at the wheel seemed to care.

Sixty, yes seventy miles an hour they rushed on, flirting with death.

Detective Jim was ready to attempt any rash thing now rather than allow himself to fall again into the clutches of his deadly foes.

He carried their secret on his person.

True, as yet he had not found a chance to look upon the precious paper that had been hidden in the lining of his coat by the cunning desperado when in the toils, under the belief that that would be the last place any one would look for it; and if he were so lucky as to get out of prison it would be an easy job to secure possession of the document again.

If no other way offered one of the gang could go around as an old clo' man and by offering fabulous prices purchase what castoffs the detective possessed; or a bulglary at his home might bring to light the much wanted coat.

A second mile was reeled off.

Going at such a tremendous speed the detective could not attempt to play any trick, such as turning aside and losing himself in the byroads.

A straight course was the only safe way.

He was not quite so confident now that he could outspeed the pursuers.

In fact, he began to strongly suspect that they were coming up on him, slowly but surely.

The coughing of the pursuing motor seemed plainer than before.

He dared not take his eyes from the dusty road ahead one second in order to glance toward the rear.

If he had known of any way by which the already wild pace of his machine could be increased Crawley would not have hesitated an instant about adopting the same. He was a man absolutely without fear.

But his engine was already working to its extreme limit.

There was danger that it would give way at any second, or a tire fly off; in either case the chances for his coming out of the adventure minus a broken neck were slim indeed.

By the time the second mile had been swiftly passed over all doubt was removed from his mind concerning the fact of the enemy gaining.

The chugging sound of the motor beat upon his ears louder than ever, showing that they must be overhauling him at a rapid rate now.

That meant only one thing.

He must either wreck the machine he was in, and take his chances of being caught in the smash; or else slow down and leap overboard in the hope of finding safety in the darkness of the night.

Crawley chose the latter method.

He knew that as soon as he slowed his car the pursuing one must do the same, or take the chances of a collision.

His lamps showed him that he must be near some sort of farm house, for there were haystacks alongside the road, just beyond the fence.

He shut off the power, and began to apply the brake.

Caution was necessary in doing this, in order that the fierce pace might not serve to bring about the very catastrophe he would avoid.

He knew the others had been quick to note his action, and follow suit.

Just as the machine was brought to a slow pace he turned its head into the fence at the side of the road.

There was a loud crash.

Splintered boards and rails flew in every direction.

The detective had not been as reckless as appearances indicated.

He had kept on the alert, and was ready to make a spring from the machine just before it came in contact with the barrier.

Consequently, when the smash happened, Crawley was not in the car, but had landed on all fours at one side.

He rolled over and over, believing that those in the other car, passing by, were sure to fire at him, if they could ascertain just where he had landed.

Then he crawled through a gap in the fence.

It was a lucky thing for him that this happened to be so convenient, for the pursuing motor had by this time come to a halt.

Several men leaped forth and spread around in a hasty search for the object of their attention.

Crawley ran along the other side of the fence for a short distance.

Seeing what seemed to be a big barn looming up close at hand he hurried over, and finding the door unfastened, pushed inside.

He could hear animals munching hay close by.

Then his groping hands came in contact with a ladder, which seemed to lead up to the hayloft.

This suited his purpose just then, and he immediately ascended.

There happened to be plenty of hay in the loft, and under this he burrowed as far as he could.

It seemed as though he might be following a channel that had already been explored, for he had no difficulty in passing on.

At the time he thought this strange, but quickly forgot all about it, since he profited by the fact.

A little later he had cause to remember with a shiver that there *was* a tunnel running under the mow, *as though something had pushed a way foot by foot toward the outside of the barn.*

When he heard the murmur of voices he stopped moving and listened.

So far as he knew he was close to the outer planking, which consisted of boards with inch crevices between.

It was Red Leary talking first of all.

"I tell you I saw him skip across right here. He was headin' straight for the door of this barn. Ten to one he went in too."

"The door's unfastened," said a softer voice.

That was Sim the Penman's.

Crawley knew it well, for it was like the owner, soft and silky, but as cruel as anything that ever walked on two feet.

The check-raiser would laugh to see a man he happened to dislike being shredded on a torture wheel.

He was a fiend, even worse than the rougher Leary.

"Of course he went in. I could swear to it. The thing is, how are we going to get him out? If the farmer comes around tell him we're officers in pursuit of a notorious criminal. He'll want to help us then."

"Red, you're taking lessons from Harry. That sounded like his ways. If he hadn't come back you would have done all right for leader."

"And it makes me savage to think we went to all that trouble to get him out, only to learn that he'd gone and stuck the paper in the lining of that cur of a detec's coat, letting him tote it all around these weeks. I never heard of such a piece of boldness. Who but Harry would have thought of that game! But let's go inside. I've got the lantern along with me."

"I saw you snatch it up as we ran out of the room. Long head that of yours, old pal. Here, take a match and light up."

Then came a sudden flash.

They had lighted the lantern.

Detective Crawley had not counted on this.

His chances began to shrink a little.

He wondered what they would think if they happened to spy the tunnel under the haymow.

Perhaps it would have been well after all had he kept free from any buildings.

He was sorry he had not dodged around, and waited, for perhaps the whole party might leave the car, and then he would have a chance to leap aboard and be off.

By the time they got the other machine out of the splintered fence and started he would have been in a position to laugh at them.

It was too late now.

He had made his bed and must lie in it.

Still, he might squirm around a bit, and seek refuge further under the hay.

He considered this idea worth cultivating, and in order to profit by it began to dig further on.

It was while he was thus creeping on his stomach, trying to make as few rustling sounds as possible, that his extended hand fell upon something that sent a cold chill over his whole frame.

He knew what he had touched.

Experience in the past had made the detective a judge of such strange things.

It was a human face, an icy face!

There could be no mistake.

He was under the haymow with a dead man!

CHAPTER VI.

A GHASTLY FIND.

The detective did not flinch beyond that first shudder.

He had run up against too many strange things during his eventful life to be staggered by a thing like this.

Of course it was an unexpected event.

Still, if given his choice he would much prefer to find a dead man under that haymow than a live bull dog for instance.

Who the unknown was, and how he came there were matters that just then did not concern him in the least.

He had his own affairs to consider.

The searchers had ascended to the loft.

Somehow it appeared to strike them as perfectly natural that if a man wished to conceal himself in the barn he would climb to the loft and crawl under the hay.

Discovery then was imminent.

Detective Jim had always been lightning-like in his methods of planning.

These shrewd men would surely notice the tunnel, for they had the light of the lantern to assist them.

What then?

A search would follow.

Of course they would expect to find something at the end of the bore; and the detective intended that they should.

The dead man would be there all ready for them!

After all the fact of tragedy being in the loft might serve the hunted officer as a mask to hide his presence there.

All he did was to push his way to one side, so that he was quite out of line of the tunnel.

Then he waited for the result.

"Move aside, Sim; I've got a pitchfork. Let me jam it in good and hard," he heard in the well known voice of Red Leary.

"Wait. Take a look here first, pal."

"What's doing? Seems like that hay has been disturbed lately, eh?"

"Somebody or something has crept under. Why, it's a regular tunnel, Red."

"Listen!"

"What did you think you heard?"

"Foxey is talking with somebody down below."

"Perhaps the farmer has appeared to find out what's doing?"

"Say, that's just what. And here they come up the ladder."

"Remember we're officers after an escaped criminal."

"I'm on, all right. Hello, there, who's that?"

"It's me, boys, with the owner of this barn. He heard the smash of the fence and has come out to see what's doing. I told him that we are police officers from New York, chasing a notorious criminal, who had escaped from the stone jug," came in the voice of Foxey Jones.

The man under the hay laughed softly to himself. He could appreciate a joke even when it was on himself; and the nerve of these rascals appealed to him.

"That's all right, fellers. Jacks is my name. I'm fur law an' order I am. Ef ye think the raskel has been an' crept under the hay why jest git him out. I'll stand back o' ye. Jacks is my name. I own this farm. Jab that fork in right hard, Mister, an' p'raps ye'll strike ile."

Then followed some plunging on the part of Red, who apparently reached in as far as he could.

From the sounds the detective judged he was slowly crawling into the tunnel, thrusting ahead of him with the sharp-pointed fork.

A minute later Red gave utterance to a whoop.

"Got him that time. I felt him squirm!" he called.

"Jab him some more, Mister. Ain't he got the nerve ter hide in my hay?"

"Pull him out, Red. Make him surrender. He hasn't any gun, remember!"

Leary was muttering to himself as he continued to push his way forward.

Perhaps he wondered why there was no movement now when he thrust the tines of the fork viciously ahead.

Detective Jim shrank back in his little nest.

He did not want the other to accidentally touch him in passing, since that would blow the whole game.

Presently Red gave another shout.

It might mean satisfaction or dismay.

Had he too touched that awful icy face, or did it happen that his groping hand first came in contact with the feet of the grim figure?

"Got him?" yelled the farmer from without.

"Yes, by the feet. The fool was lying all doubled up."

"Don't he kick some?"

"Reckon he's fainted. Comes along like a dead weight."

"Skeered p'raps. I've knowed fellers ter drap thet way when frightened. Kin ye drag him out, partner?" demanded the farmer, fully excited.

This was a new experience for him.

What was the need of going to the Hippodrome when such exciting events happened right at home?

"I'm getting there. Just wait. He's a load."

Detective Jim held his breath and listened for the explosion to follow.

A few seconds passed.

Then came a shout from one of the watchers.

"This ain't our man! It's a stiff! Why, he's been dead some time!"

"What's that?" exclaimed the farmer, in a trembling voice.

"A dead man under your hay. This look serious, Jacks, for you. Do you know who he is?" demanded Sim, who seemed able to grasp the situation better than any of the others.

"Yes, it's my hired man, Pete. He was gone all yesterday. I thort he's skipped out ter the city. He was a sick man, complainin' all the time. And Pete's dead. Crawled under the hay and guv up? That knocks me silly."

"What's he got gripped in his hand there, Red?"

"Looks like a bottle o' medicine. Hold the light down. Thunder!"

"What ails you now?"

"It's poison. The poor devil's committed suicide."

"He was allers ailin', gents," whined the farmer, evidently with a load taken off his mind.

"It's lucky for you, old man, he gave the thing away like this. Lower him down on the hay, Red. Now, this isn't business. Finding this dead man doesn't cut any ice in our affairs. What we want to know is where did that infernal detective go?"

"Hey, what's that?" exclaimed the farmer, startled.

"This crook has been passing himself off as a detective, that's all. Here, boys, spread out and look further. He may be under the hay in another place."

"Unless he's slipped out below while we jawed up here over this thing."

There followed a vigorous hustling, as though each one might be throwing the hay around in the effort to locate the missing man.

Detective Jim felt secure in his hiding place.

He knew they could not come near him unless the entire body of hay were removed and of course no one in their senses would think of doing that.

Money could not hire any one of them to crawl into that tunnel again.

The presence of a dead man there had put a hoodoo upon that avenue.

As the hunt grew hotter and the men showed signs

of more or less excitement, he began to wonder how it was going to end.

He soon found that out.

Some one gave a sudden shout.

Could that alarm mean that another corpse had been discovered?

Other voices joined in, until it seemed as though Bedlam had broken loose.

"Fire!"

The hidden detective jumped to a conclusion on the spur of the moment.

Whoever happened to be carrying the lantern must have stumbled, perhaps striking his boot on the points of the hayfork.

In endeavoring to preserve an equilibrium he had dashed the lighted lantern violently against the wall or upon the floor.

That accounted for the crash the detective had heard.

There must have been oil in the lantern, which was spilled in every direction, and in a flash the flames sprang up.

"Get out of here, boys!" shouted Red Leary.

"But my barn, my hay!" shrieked the farmer.

"Nothing can save them. Go down and get your horses out, man!"

"I'll be ruined, I tell ye!"

"You'll be roasted if you stay up here. Drop that stiff down, Red. It would be a pity to have the poor devil cremated."

"What of him?"

"Who—Crawley—let him sizzle. Serve the nervy fool right for meddling with our business. Down with you, boys. She's getting hotter than Hades up here!"

All this was pleasant news for the man under the hay.

If he crawled out he was liable to be punctured by half a dozen bullets from the guns of the gang he had hunted.

To stay where he was meant being burned alive!

Detective Jim felt that he was between the devil and the deep sea.

Already it was too late to push his way back through that tunnel, and reach the open loft.

He could see a glare in that quarter to prove that the whole place was ablaze.

Down below the loud voices of men mingled with the shrill neighs of horses.

Apparently the animals had already scented smoke and were becoming frantic.

Unless the farmer made haste he would have difficulty in saving the beasts from the wreck of his big barn.

Once the hay fully caught it would wipe out every stick of timber, and woe to the living thing caught like a rat in the trap.

That was what the detective began to believe represented his position.

And the terrible seconds were passing, making escape more difficult.

CHAPTER VII.

TURNING THE TABLES.

There was only one thing for Detective Crawley to do.

Since retreat to the rear was cut off by the flames that had taken full possession of the loft he must push on ahead.

He burrowed on, and in a brief time reached the side of the barn.

It was an old structure.

The boards in places hung loosely, so that it would not require very strenuous work on the part of any one to knock one or more from their fastenings.

Left to himself he knew he could accomplish his escape readily enough.

The trouble was, would not those keen-eyed crooks be on the watch for something of this sort?

Needs must when the devil drives, they say, and there was nothing else left to him but to go ahead, taking his chances.

He smashed his foot against the board nearest him. It moved as though insecurely fastened.

Another kick, this time more furiously than before. He could feel it giving way, although the rusty nails still held on.

A third time he let drive.

There was a quick response, for a gaping aperture rewarded his labor.

Perhaps one of the gang lingered below, with finger pressing the trigger of a self-action revolver.

If a dozen awaited his coming, still would the detective have slipped through that aperture.

Anything was preferable to being roasted alive.

He dropped with a thud to the ground.

Being almost as light of foot as a cat, he managed to land on all fours, and thus broke the shock of his fall.

There was plenty of noise and confusion around that section just then, what with the shrill neighing of frightened horses, shouts of men, and cries from the direction of the farm house near by.

But no pistol shot announced to the detective that his appearance had been witnessed by one of the enemy.

He crawled along, on the lookout for a chance to vanish, for as the fire broke out the scene would soon be brightly illuminated.

Ten feet away he came to an old wagon under which he crawled, just in time to avoid being seen by Red

Leary and Foxey who came abruptly around the corner.

They stood so close the man in hiding could have touched them had he wished.

Of course he did nothing of the kind.

The only thing he wanted just then was to be left alone.

"Say, if that fool's in there he's a goner," remarked Foxey.

"His goose is sure cooked. But I somehow just can't believe Crawley would ever let himself be caught in such a silly trap."

"Don't you believe he went in the barn at all?"

"Yes, I'm dead sure of that; but he's either got out while we fooled our time away with that dead man in the loft, or else he's going to jump up any second now."

"What's this—a board on the ground?"

"Say, we crossed over here when we came, and that board wasn't lying there then!"

"It's been kicked off up yonder—see, here's a bunch of hay that fell out at the time *somebody* slipped down out of the loft!"

"We're done for, Foxey—a pack of lunatics. That sleuth has been too smart for us, after all. He's gone, that's what. Jumped out while we helped the farmer drag his horses into the open. We'd better have attended to our own business, and let 'em burn."

"Perhaps he hasn't got far away?"

"Don't you believe it. That slick sleuth is lightning on the run. He's given us the slip, and carried off the captain's paper, curse him. What ails you now?"

"I was just thinking that if he fell out of that hole up yonder he must have landed close by here."

"That's easy. What next?"

"Why, he couldn't go around that side of the barn because we were all there."

"Go up head, Foxey. Now tell us some more."

"Suppose he started to crawl this way?"

"Yes."

"And we came around the corner suddenly?"

"Which we certain did."

"He'd have to hide, wouldn't he, Red?"

"Course he would."

"Well, we didn't see him, did we?"

"Not any. If we had we'd filled his hide with lead, I reckon."

"Ten to one he hid here under this old wagon."

Red laughed harshly.

"You ought never to have took to tough ways, Foxey. You could a done all your thievin' under the shelter of the law. What you say sounds reasonable like. All you've got to do now is to prove it."

"All right. Here goes!"

He stooped down.

By now the flames had found an outlet above.

The darkness was a thing of the past.

If there was anything the size of a dog under that wagon a pair of sharp eyes like those of Foxey Jones would discover it.

Red Leary did not really place much faith in this theory of his companion.

He expected to hear the other admit that his reasoning had been at fault.

Consequently he was startled when he heard the sharp report of a gun close by.

Then came a second discharge!

Foxey fell back almost into his arms.

"I'm shot!" he exclaimed, gripping his arm.

"Who did it?" cried the other, staggered.

Things had happened so rapidly that he could not place his finger on the pulse of the action.

"That cursed sleuth!" grated the other, groaning with pain.

"But he didn't have a gun."

"He snatched mine out of my hand, don't you understand. I fired first, but he knocked my arm up. Then before I knew what he was doing he grabbed my wrist, whipped the gun away, and gave me one."

Leary swore horribly.

He threw his companion to one side and straightened up.

Things seemed to be going from bad to worse.

Not only was the daring detective free, but he had now managed to secure a weapon, and was in a condition to battle for his life.

Red had snatched out his own gun.

He saw something moving just beyond the range of light thrown by the tongues of flame that burst out of the loft.

Quick as a flash he fired in that direction.

A laugh came back.

Apparently he had wasted his lead.

Once more he turned loose.

Confusion! the laugh was repeated, and then came a flash and a report.

Something whistled past his head, burning the flesh as it sped by.

That "something" was a bullet from the revolver of the detective.

It made Red involuntarily dodge, because he knew that had he wished Crawley could have punctured his head with that bit of lead, such was his reputation as a pistol shot among the shooting galleries of the metropolis.

That he did not was proof that he hoped to bring Red to book some day, and land him behind the bars.

To a man of Crawley's profession a live crook in handcuffs is worth ten dead ones.

Just then Sim came rushing around the corner.

"What's doing?" he shouted, in excitement.

"He's been here—that infernal detective!"

"Did you nail him?"

Three shots having been fired, Sim believed himself

justified in thinking that one of his comrades must have accomplished something worth while.

Red Leary swore harder than ever.

"Naw. He nipped Foxey here in the shoulder—snatched his gun out of his hand and turned it on him."

Then it was a chorus of hard words broke loose.

"Which way did he go?" demanded Sim, still eager to pursue.

"Over yonder. By this time he's on the blamed road and going like a fiend."

"You forget."

"What?"

"The machine!"

"The devil! It's over there right ahead of him!"

"He'll get it sure, boys."

"And leave us in the lurch. After him!"

They sprang away like hounds set free from the leash.

A sound came to their ears even as they made the first jump.

It was the unmistakable whirr of a motor, as an impatient hand gave the crank a series of revolutions that turned the engine over.

"Faster! He's jumping in the car!"

There came the chug-chug of a motor starting.

"Split his tires! Down him!"

Then followed a fusillade of shots.

No explosion succeeded, proving that somehow the rain of bullets had not accomplished the end they had in view.

The three crooks just had a glimpse of a shadowy motor speeding along the road like a ghost.

Their guns were empty, and apparently they stood there helpless, while the man they hated was rapidly placing considerable distance between.

Then they made a rush for the other car to drag it out of the broken fence.

Jumping aboard they set out on their apparently hopeless chase.

Behind, the flames roared above the doomed barn, while the farmer's neighbors came rushing from all quarters to gap at the figure lying on the ground, and cast suspicious eyes on Jacks himself.

He would have to do lots of explaining to account for the presence of the dead man who had been found in his haymow.

CHAPTER VIII.

SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR.

Detective Jim felt like shouting.

He had good reason to give vent to his feelings in this fashion.

Through all the vicissitudes of fortune he had managed to emerge on top.

A short time before he was at the mercy of the sewer rats, or the inflowing tide, with death staring him in the face, almost a certainty.

Now he had beaten his enemies at their own game, given the bloodhounds of the crook league the slip, and was carrying off the master secret of Handsome Harry.

As he sped along he listened from time to time to discover whether the others were following in his wake. There was another car.

So far as he knew it had not been badly injured by the little smash-up in connection with the fence.

He knew the nature of these scoundrels well enough not to believe they would give the chase up so long as a single hope remained.

Should they fail to locate him after a decent time possibly they might sweep back to the lone house of his captivity to confer with the leader, who had been left behind by the swift rush of events.

Meanwhile, what about the paper he carried?

From what he had heard he was convinced that it bore some sort of reference to the hiding-place of the swag these men had heaped up during the several years the gang had worked together.

It was believed to be half a million or more, a prize worth having.

They had been figuring on dividing the spoils and emigrating to foreign parts to enjoy their ill-gotten gains at just the time the leader fell into the trap set by Detective Crawley, and was carried to the Tombs.

No one but Handsome Harry knew just where the treasure was concealed.

He had written it upon a piece of paper in a secret alphabet used by the gang, but which would seem like so much Greek to the uninformed.

But after he had, as he thought, played so sharp a game by making the coat of the detective the custodian of his secret, Handsome Harry wished he had obeyed his first inclination, and chewed the bit of paper up into a wad.

For he suddenly remembered that he had carelessly left the solution of the problem in one of his pockets.

The explanation of the secret alphabet was in a little note-book which fell into Crawley's hands after the prisoner was searched.

Hence, should the valuable paper be found the detective stood ready to read the directions upon it just as readily as one of the crooks.

Of course Crawley was fairly itching now to have a glance at the paper.

He thrust his hand along the lining of his coat to make sure it was still there, and had not fallen out during his adventures along the road.

It was all right, as he could tell from the touch.

Once he felt assured that he had left the pursuing

car in the lurch he wanted to scan the contents of that little sheet.

Accordingly the first cross road he came to he took. Perhaps the others might go on.

Then again their cunning might cause them to halt while they examined the dust.

The sign of his tire print would give the story away, and tell them how he had turned in here.

Back and forth he wriggled, turning every corner he came to.

A dozen shifts had been made.

By that time he was many miles away from the burning barn, the light of which could be seen in the sky in his rear.

The lamps of the car gave but a meagre light, the gas being low.

It seemed sufficient for his purpose, however.

He jumped out and passed around until he could bend over a lamp.

Already his eager fingers had worked the precious little bit of paper along inside the lining of his coat until he could extract it.

Just as he anticipated it was written in cipher.

Without the key the whole thing would have been unreadable.

But Crawley had mastered the signs perfectly, believing he would find occasion to use them sooner or later.

And that time had certainly come now.

This was what he read, standing there by the flickering lamp of the car:

"The old mill on Ver Plank road—in a discarded iron urn underneath scraps of rusty iron—small wooden box—in bills."

Crawley read this over a second time.

He was lost in wonder.

What could have induced Handsome Harry to secrete his treasure in such a strange place as this?

There were hundreds of places more accessible.

He could have even lodged it in a box in some safe deposit company's vaults.

That was just it—possibly the artful scoundrel figured that if ever there was a search made for his treasure—those places would be the first ones visited. He may have had other reasons for picking out the spot he did.

Detective Jim cared nothing for these reasons.

He was dealing in facts just then.

The Ver Plank Road was well known to him.

Yes, and he remembered the very mill in question.

It was a relic of olden days, and many artists had drawn it and painted it.

Attached to the mill was a rocking cottage, occupied by a family.

Best of all, the hiding-place of Harry's ill-gotten hoard was not seven miles away from where he stood at that very minute.

"Good! I can reach there and have the old urn searched long before those jays ever get back to Harry, and yank him over to the place. I'm in it for keeps!"

Back into the car again.

Once more he hit up quite a pace, and after more or less dodging around corners reached a well traveled road running north.

Now he could let out still another kink in the way of speed.

There were no impediments along the way.

The hour must have been half way between midnight and morning, for he met no other car on the road.

Perhaps there may have been machines which rushed along that road at a faster clip than Detective Jim did, but he fairly burned space.

Any one who tried conclusions with the gang of which Handsome Harry was chief had to hustle to get ahead of the bunch; for every one of them had been accounted a master hand at his trade.

As he sped down a descent the detective slowed up.

The mill according to his recollection should lie in the hollow, just beyond the little bridge spanning the brook from which power used to be taken in the old days of its usefulness.

He was right.

It loomed up before him as he came across the iron bridge that had taken the place of the wooden structure that had once been a leading feature of the scene.

While thus making time he had been turning the thing over in his mind.

Not knowing just where the old iron urn might chance to be lying in the mill he had concluded that it would be his best policy to arouse the inmates of the cottage, and offer some plausible excuse for wishing to search the urn.

As an officer of the law he was empowered to do many things that might seem strange for any other man to attempt.

Stopping his car directly in front of the cottage he jumped out.

In another moment he was pounding on the door.

A movement within told that his summons had been heard.

Then a window was cautiously raised above.

"Who is there?" asked a man's voice.

"Will you please come down and see me? I have some very important business with you, sir."

A consultation seemed to be going on above, and a woman's voice could be heard.

"This is a strange time of night to come here and rap on a man's door."

"I know it, but there was need of haste, or I would not have bothered you."

"Who are you?"

"I am an officer of the law. You can be of great assistance to me, sir. Please come down as soon as you

can. There is no danger at all. I am alone. But I must have your help."

Some more whispering followed.

Evidently the woman did not like the idea of her husband going down.

On his part, curiosity had been aroused.

Besides, he had been an old soldier, and he had a pistol, so what should he fear?

"I'll be down in a minute or so, mister," he called out.

"Thank you."

A light sprang up above.

The man was throwing on a few garments, for the night air was chilly.

Presently he came down the stairs.

When he opened the door the detective saw a tall figure, holding a candle in one hand and an enormous horse pistol in the other.

The man looked at him cautiously.

"Now mister, what do you want with me?" he asked.

"Please lower that shooting-iron. As I said before, there is nothing to fear. I am a detective officer from New York, and I have come out all the way here to search for some stolen article that I have reason to believe is hidden in your mill."

"Say, are you calling me a thief?"

"Not at all. This thing was, as I happen to know, done entirely without your knowledge. I'm telling you frankly that it is the spoils of many robberies. Just why Handsome Harry should secrete it in your mill I do not know, but he did."

He mentioned the name in order to see whether the other started.

Such a thing did not happen.

If the chief of the Brotherhood was known to this man it must be under some other name.

"You say it is hid in my mill right now?" demanded the other, eagerly.

"So I have reason to believe."

"Say, is there any reward for finding this stuff, mister?"

"I'll see that you are well rewarded, my friend, in case we find what I am looking for. Will you go with me?"

"Sure I will. I ain't got anything worth stealing, and you don't look like a tough character anyway, mister."

"Thanks for the compliment. Please hasten."

"What's the hurry? Say, you said this stuff had been stolen—air the fellows that hooked it apt to come along just now?"

"You're a smart one, my friend. That's just what may happen, for they know I'm after the swag, hot-footed. That doesn't frighten you, I hope?"

"What, me? I been through the war, mister. See this limp—that comes from a bullet I got at Chancel-

lorsville. You'll find me game enough, I guess. Just foller me now. Here's the door of the mill. I swan if it ain't open, too. Now, I thought I shut her up tight last night; but the wind must a blowed the door back."

Detective Crawley wondered if this were so, or could Handsome Harry have reached the place ahead of him after all?

They entered.

The old veteran showed his innocence by stalking ahead of the stranger.

He would have offered an easy mark to any one desirous of giving him a touch of sand-bag or black-jack.

"What was that?" he asked, after they had entered. A rustling sound came from the darkness beyond.

"A rat perhaps—proceed."

But while the detective said this he had an idea the sound might have been caused by some one endeavoring to slip away from the little circle of light thrown by the old man's candle.

"Well, here we air in the mill. Now, supposin' you tell me what part of it you want to search?"

"I don't know."

"Say, look here, mister, that sounds mighty funny."

"I mean that I don't know where the old urn happens to stand."

"Old urn?"

"Yes, that was what I said."

"Say, was the swag hid in that danged old urn as has stood here all these years?"

"It was secreted in that very place, sir."

"Then, mister, I'm afraid you ain't goin' to lift that plunder this time. I'm sorry too, for I'd like to handle that reward, I would."

"What do you mean by that, man?"

"Why, the urn, she's gone!"

"Gone?"

"That's what I said, mister."

"How does that happen—did you give it away?"

"I sold it!"

"Who to?"

"A rag and old iron man named Pietro Vinetto. He comes out from the city!"

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT THE JUNKMAN GOT.

Again it looked as though the detective had struck a snag.

Just as he was about to stretch out his hand and capture the prize it was rudely snatched from his hands.

He felt as though some one had knocked a glass from

his grasp just as his lips touched the rim and tasted the sweet contents.

But Detective Jim was a man who never gave up.

So long as the party into whose hands the old urn had fallen was not Handsome Harry there was hope remaining.

"That is bad, for me I mean. I shall have much of my work all over again," he said, eyeing the other to make sure that no deception was being attempted.

"I'm sorry too, mister. Guess I made a bad mistake that time. Pietro he has been after that urn a good many times; but he offered me such a ridiculous price I always laughed at him. Yesterday afternoon as he was heading toward the city, going home he said, he stopped again."

"Yes, and this time?"

"The urn again, always the urn. He said he had fallen in love with it, mister, but I think he knew where he could sell it at a big figure."

"Probably. Pietro, like all his countryman, is wise. This time he offered you a larger sum?"

"Yes, we bargained. I was surprised to find that he seemed more eager than ever to get hold of it. I held to my figure tight."

"Then he paid all you asked?"

"He did, every cent. I have not got over wondering at it. Say, mister, do you think Pietro knew anything about that loot hid in the urn?"

Now, that was just the suspicion that had flashed into the mind of the detective.

He did not know who Pietro was.

The Italian might have learned in some way that the old urn had a value far above what its appearance would indicate.

"What time was this?" he asked.

"About four."

"Yesterday afternoon, you say?"

"Yes."

"And Pietro was headed toward the city?"

"Going home, he said. He had his wagon pretty well filled with stuff. There was hardly room to put the urn in. I helped him lift it up and stow it."

"You can understand that this is all important to me, my friend?"

"Yes."

"And I promise you that if I manage to recover that loot, you shall be rewarded for assisting me. Here I have run up against a snag. Tell me, did Pietro seem unusually excited at the time?"

"I thought so. It made me feel more certain than ever that he had found a good customer for the urn. He hurried away."

"Well, if Pietro had any idea of what he was purchasing when he bought that old bit of iron he certainly had reason to hurry. I believe there were a lot of scraps in the urn at the time. Did you remove these?"

"I did not. They amounted to nothing, and I was getting a good price, so I let Pietro have the odds and ends."

"And he did not make any investigation of the urn?"

"Not as long as he was in sight; just whipped up his old rack of bones and made up the rise yonder. On the top of the hill he looked back, and seeing me, waved his hand and whip."

"You say he lives in New York?"

"Yes."

"Listen. It is important that I see Pietro as soon as possible. Can you tell me where I could find him?"

The man scratched his head as if to stir up his memory.

Detective Crawley waited eagerly.

This chase for the stolen loot was taking him in many strange regions; but no matter, with the golden lure still at the end of the trail he was as determined as ever to keep on the jump.

"I heard him say once that he lived in some street close to Mulberry. For the life of me I don't seem able to remember."

"All right. Close to Mulberry, you say. I'll find him, never fear. The city is big but not big enough to hide Pietro from me. And I'll remember you, my friend. Is there anything else you can tell me?"

"I don't know. There was the girl."

"Eh? what girl?"

"She was interested in that urn too."

"A girl interested in the urn—how did that come?"

"She used to ride out here every few days, and always wanted to look at that rusty old iron thing. Said she was an artist, and something about it appealed to her."

"She never offered to purchase it from you?"

"Oh! no, sir. Just used to pass her hand over it like, and then get on her tiptoes to look inside."

"That sounds interesting. My friend, can you describe this young woman rider?"

"I ain't a master hand at telling how people look, mister, but I can try. She might be all of twenty-one or two, a slip of a girl, with a strong face but a sweet one too. Her eyes, well, there, mister, you got me—sometimes I thought they was blue, and next time I seen they was gray. I guess they changed, 'cording to how the weather happened to be, blue for sunny days, gray for dark."

"I've seen just such a pair of eyes, and they were in the head of Handsome Harry's daughter. Then she must have known the secret too. And every time she rode out alone she used to drop in here just to make sure the old urn was safe. I was told she was a fine girl, and not at all in sympathy with Harry's methods of making a living. I wonder what she had in mind when she came out here to take a look at that urn. See here, my friend, did you ever leave the young lady

alone in the mill when she was looking at the urn?"

A suspicion had flashed into his mind.

What if the girl had been playing some clever game?

How else explain her coming so often to simply look at the urn?

Perhaps she was urged to secure possession of the loot, after her father had been arrested—perhaps she meant to hold it for him, or even return the plunder as far as possible, to those from whom it had been taken.

"Not that I remember, mister. I always came in with her, and stayed here. You see there's rats around this mill, and wimmen as a rule are afraid of the farmints."

"When was she here last?"

"That's the funny part of it I was going to tell you about, mister."

"Well, go on."

"She was here last evening."

"After Pietro had taken the urn away?"

"Nearly two hours afterward. We was just sitting down to supper when she rode up. I went out to see her."

"Surely she did not wish to look at the urn then—it must have been getting dark?"

"No, but she asked about it."

"When you told her about your selling it?"

"Yes."

"And she was naturally excited at the news?"

"Sure she was. Said that she always intended buying it for herself, and that I did wrong to let it go."

"Of course you were astonished at what she said?"

"Very much, mister. I began to wonder what there could be about that blamed old thing to excite so many people. And when you mentioned it too, I thought I'd jest fall over."

"But the young lady—she asked about the junkman too?"

"She did, and I told her just what I did you."

"And then?"

"She whipped up her horse and went lickety split up over the hill as if the old Satan were after her."

Crawley had something to ponder over now.

Undoubtedly this daughter of the brotherhood chief was on the trail of the loot.

"She did not know anything about her father's supposed death in prison; but acting from some secret motive she was bent upon recovering the treasure that had been secreted in the old urn as a safe hiding-place.

Unless he was smart the daughter of Handsome Harry might get the better of him.

Detective Jim never made the mistake of underestimating the abilities of those against whom he happened to be pitted.

Even though it be a woman he knew from experience that it would be harder for him to understand the plan she might evolve than were his antagonist

a man; for a woman's mind works in channels vastly different from that of the other sex.

His next move must be to hasten to the city, and find that Italian junkman with as little delay as possible.

Of course the girl, Annette was her name he remembered, could not have made any attempt to communicate with her father at the old house, for she was in complete ignorance concerning what strange things were going on around them, connected with the clever scheme for gaining the release of Handsome Harry from jail.

Then she would plainly proceed straight to the city, and search for the junkman, personally, with the intention of recovering the valuable contents of the urn.

Altogether it had now become about as pretty a case as our friend the detective had handled in a long while.

And when it is understood that Handsome Harry was actually hidden there in the old mill, having managed to reach the place on a motor cycle ahead of the detective, who had been delayed on the road; and that he had heard all the old veteran said, it can be readily understood that with three persons chasing up and down the Italian district of New York, there would be something doing for Pietro Vinetto.

Leaving the owner of the ruined mill, Crawley sprang into his car, and turning, headed for the city.

"But he did not know that he carried a passenger on behind, and that no other than Handsome Harry himself."

CHAPTER X.

THE HOUSE OF THE DRAGONS' HEADS.

Handsome Harry had made use of a motor cycle in reaching the mill; but as luck would have it the machine broke down.

This happened just as he drew near his destination, so it did not interfere with his plans.

The man of the cottage saw a figure dart out of the mill and fasten on behind the tonneau of the car as the detective started up the rise.

He shouted out to warn the other, but at the distance, and with the purring of the motor in his ears, Crawley did not catch what was said.

The dust helped to conceal the hanger-on from view.

So Detective Jim finally entered the environs of Harlem, and crossing the river found himself in New York.

Something impelled him to turn and glance back.

A figure was just dodging around a corner.

"Looked like Harry to a dot. I wonder if he could

have been hanging on all this time. It would be just like him. And to think they let him get away, under the belief that he was dead. Well, it makes it all the harder to get him again. The joke is on those who were deceived. Perhaps a doctor may have been bribed."

So he muttered as he made his way toward his own home, intending to slip into some sort of disguise before attempting to hunt for the Italian junkman.

The race was still open.

He soon arrived home.

First of all he called up headquarters to put them in touch with the astonishing mistake that had been made.

If all the police in the city had their eyes open to find the notorious crook, Harry was apt to fight shy of showing himself, and that would be eliminating one feature of the game.

There would remain the junkman himself, and Annette unless it happened that Red and Sim and Foxey were roped into the game through some urgent message from the chief, now bent on reclaiming the accumulated loot.

It was still night when Detective Crawley again slipped out of his apartments.

He was now apparently a rough character, and from long experience he could play this part as well as any Bowery boy of the old school.

A message to a garage near by had brought an attendant who had taken the car away, so that was off his mind.

Of course Mulberry street, and all that neighborhood was very familiar ground to a man like Detective Jim, who had scoured the region hundreds of times in the pursuit of his profession.

More than once in his progress downtown he had a policeman look him over curiously; but every time Crawley gave a recognized signal that brought a smile to the face of the bull.

He understood that the word had gone out to watch for Handsome Harry, who was at large again; and they knew what that meant.

The man who could corner the slickest of crooks, and rope him in, would be sure of a good mark that might spell promotion.

As he drew nearer the scene of his intended operations, the detective became more cautious, and avoided meeting any of the police.

His manner became slinking, and at a glance the passerby would be apt to say he was a man whom no honest man would care to run up against.

The peep of dawn found him in Mulberry street.

He asked cautious questions of any chance person he met on the street.

Surely Pietro Vinetto must be known, especially since he owned a wagon, and was engaged in the old junk trade.

He must have a cellar somewhere close by, in which all his findings and purchases were stored until he could sort them over and dispose of the same.

Soon the street became lively with early risers, nearly all of whom were natives of Sunny Italy.

The delay fretted Crawley.

If it should happen that Handsome Harry knew where the junkman held forth how easily he could steal a march upon the detective, who was groping in the dark, trying to pick up information after his usual habits?

Presently he caught a slight clue.

A man said he knew Vinetto well.

"What is his business?" asked the disguised officer, quickly in Italian.

"He is a junkman."

"Good. I see you do know my friend. I wish to find him very much. There is some news for Pietro."

"Good news?" asked the cautious foreigner.

"Surely. It means money in his pocket; just as I place this piece of gold in your hand, comrade."

"What do you expect me to do for this?"

"Simply take me to Pietro. Point out to me the place where he lives. Then it is another gold piece will find the company of the one you hold."

The detective could speak in Italian as well as any native, and this man had no suspicion that he was other than he had claimed, a Neapolitan, and a friend of Pietro's.

That promise of a second five dollar coin clinched the bargain.

"It is a bargain, signor. Come with me, then."

In five minutes they had left Mulberry street and were passing through one of the narrow cross streets, where the tenements hold an army of human beings.

It was where the Italian district bordered on that containing the yellow men of China.

The two races often mingled in the street.

All the while the detective kept on the watch for a familiar face.

He half expected to see the king of crooks hovering around, ready to be in at the finish.

"Listen. When we come to the house do not point at it," he remarked.

"So?"

"That might attract attention. I would not have my friend Pietro get into any trouble, you understand."

"I shall remember. Look you down the street, signor. Perhaps you will see the house with the many fire escapes that have the dragons' heads."

"I see it. But I supposed that was occupied by Chinamen."

"And rightly. But Pietro has the basement for his shop. You see it has a wide door. Once it was used for a blacksmith shop or a stable. He can drag his wagon in and unload it at his pleasure."

"I understand. And the doors are shut. Pietro plainly has his wagon inside now."

"I saw him come in last evening, signor. He surely has not departed since."

"Enough. Here is the second gold piece. Now, my friend, walk down the street back to where we came from. I shall find Pietro alone."

He watched the house for half an hour.

Chinamen came and went, but there was not a sign from the lower part.

Pietro must sleep soundly it seemed.

Finally, determined not to wait any longer, the detective advanced toward the building that sported the many little dragons on the iron work.

He tried the door.

Somewhat to his surprise he found that it gave at his touch.

Could Pietro be so careless as to leave the door of his storeroom unfastened all through the night?

This was a neighborhood where the light-fingered gentry delighted to roam the streets, and pilfer what they could find that was not actually bolted down.

Another thought flashed into the mind of Crawley.

It was in connection with the king of crooks, the chief of that brotherhood of evil-doers which he had undertaken to break up.

Had Handsome Harry been ahead of him?

He knew the man so well that he had never underestimated his powers for carrying out his criminal instincts.

Detective Jim hastily entered the place.

It was rather dingy, once he had closed the door after him, and he stood for a minute in order to allow his eyes to get accustomed to the semi-gloom.

Was that a groan?

He drew his gun and moved cautiously forward, believing that he was about to meet with something in the nature of a surprise.

He did.

This second time the sound was so clear that there could be no mistaking it.

Some one seemed to be in pain.

But the detective, suspecting a trap, took his time about advancing now.

The memory of the man whom he had seen taken from a coffin, and apparently resurrected from the dead, was strong upon him.

Nothing was too remarkable for that clever criminal to attempt; and he might even simulate a wounded and dying man in order to tempt an enemy into his hands.

Another foot forward.

Then a pause.

In this manner he actually felt his way through the place, looking keenly at the wagon as he passed, and noting that it was still filled with an assortment of

old junk, which probably represented the collections of yesterday.

And in the end of it stood a tall iron urn, the object of so much attention, since it had been made the receptacle of the consolidated thieves' loot.

The groans came from just beyond.

Looking closer the detective saw something that had the appearance of a human figure lying there.

Then some one was really in pain, and it could not be a trap, as he had at first suspected.

Now he advanced boldly, still gripping his revolver, as though he expected to see that desperate criminal leap out of the shadows and seek to avenge himself on the author of all his recent troubles.

A man lay on the floor.

He was swathed in bandages, or as Crawley soon discovered, tied with ends of old rope and rags, until he could not move hand or foot.

He looked like a mummy lying there.

Across his jaws ran a towel, so that he could hardly breathe, let alone speak.

The detective had secured an electric torch at his house.

He now shot the light upon the face of the helpless man.

It was a dark countenance, evidently that of an Italian, Pietro beyond a doubt.

Detective Jim knew the signs only too well to wonder what it all meant.

The king of crooks had been there ahead of him!

CHAPTER XI.

THE WORK OF A FIEND.

The man's eyes were turned up toward the disguised detective appealingly.

A new hope had evidently sprung up in his heart.

Taking out his knife Crawley quickly cut the ropes, and freed the wretched prisoner of the consolidated crooks' league.

At the same time he knew there was more or less danger in doing so, for possibly Handsome Harry might still be somewhere around; or his allies have arrived upon the spot, summoned by a message from the chief.

But it was important that he hear from the Italian what had happened.

Pietro was for the time being incapable of talking; but with a trembling hand he rubbed his sore jaws, and by degrees the power to articulate returned.

While he was doing this Detective Jim considered that he would be saving time by making a rapid examination of the much prized urn.

The chances were as fifty to one that he would not find what he sought there; but at least he could make sure.

He removed the few bits of rusty iron still remaining in the receptacle.

Just as he anticipated the little wooden box secreted by the escaped prisoner of the Tombs was missing.

Some one had secured it!

There were three possibilities.

He could count them on his fingers in this wise—the girl Annette, Harry himself, and the junkman, Pietro.

Which was guilty?

Apparently not Harry, or he would never have started to torture the owner of the wagon, in order to make him confess.

Could it be Pietro—had he found the magnificent loot, and appropriating the same utterly refused to disclose its new hiding place, even when threatened with death?

This was an open question.

The detective was adjudged a good reader of character, and thus far he had not seen anything in the Italian to make him think the latter an unusual man.

Still, the feel of a roll of big bills might cause even a coward to risk much in the hope of being able to hold on to them.

There remained the girl.

Had she taken them, unknown to the junkman?

Undoubtedly Annette had become aware of the loot being hidden in the urn.

Her actions in coming out to the old mill frequently and fondling the insensible iron indicated that much.

And the fact that she galloped madly after the Italian upon hearing that he had carried the urn away, would show that she meant to possess herself of it should such a thing be possible.

But now Pietro was in part recovered, perhaps he could throw some light on the deepening mystery.

Crawley returned to the side of the groaning Italian.

As stated before he could speak the native language of Pietro almost as well as if he were a native of Genoa or Naples.

Consequently he did not find it difficult to converse with the junkman.

"Pietro," he said, sternly, "You came near death then. The man who tied you up in that way meant that you should never live through his torture."

"I believe it, signor," moaned the other, holding a bundle of rags to the side of his head.

"He accused you of taking something from that old urn. You have long been desirous of obtaining possession of the relic. Why such eagerness, Pietro, if you did not know or suspect that it contained something valuable?"

"I had a customer. Long has he wished for something just like that urn. Signor, it is a Columbus urn,

and my friend, he is an Italian. I knew he would pay big money for such a prize. That is the truth, signor, I swear it."

"You told this to the man who tied you up?"

"Again and again."

"And what did he say?"

"He but laughed at me, and swore that I was trying to deceive him."

"Of course he could not tell. Somebody took that little box from its hiding place. He suspected you because you have been wild to secure the urn. Perhaps after all he was right, Pietro."

"No, no, I swear it by everything holy. I have seen no box, signor. I am an honest man. I will prove it to you."

"Tell me how, Pietro."

"By sending you to the man who was to buy the urn from me."

"Then you had told him about it?"

"Yes, that I had seen just such an ornament as he wanted, and that I was trying to purchase it for him. Every time he saw me he would ask if the trade had yet gone through. It is so, signor, the truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Well, somebody took that box. It may have been you, it may have been I. How could Handsome Harry know? It is gone, and he is like a savage beast. Tell me, did he start to torture you, Pietro?"

"You can see for yourself, signor—I am disfigured for life!"

The man moved his head around as he spoke.

From the stains of blood upon the bandages the detective had known that there had been cruel work done; but at the time Pietro had his head turned the other way.

Now Detective Jim saw something that sent a chill of horror through his frame.

One of the Italian's ears had been shorn off close to his head!

That was the work of the madman who had so lately had him in his power.

The monster who could thus mutilate a helpless prisoner would halt at nothing in his pursuit of revenge.

This accounted for the moaning of the poor devil.

"But why did he stop? Could it be that he believed you at last?"

"He swore that I knew. He went away to send a message leaving me here tied as you found me. But he said he would return surely to finish me."

"Ah! that is interesting. He will return. We may then expect him after a bit?"

"For he said he would cut me in pieces to make me tell him what he wished to know."

"But you would not?"

"I could not. I did not know anything about the little box."

"Pietro, some men would suffer almost anything rather than give up the loot that box contained."

"Signor what use would it be to a dead man? Surely my life is worth more to me than riches. I could not take them with me."

"And had you known you would have told him then, after he had sliced an ear off, and threatened to follow it with other mutilations?"

"Gladly, signor. I would have given him everything I possessed rather than that."

"I do not know what to believe, Pietro. The box was in the urn when you placed it in your wagon. It was gone when he searched for it. Some one took it. Think, Pietro, did you meet anyone on the road—did any person pass you?"

"A number of people. As I drew near the city, hundreds. Some were walking, others in carriages and more in the devil carts."

"Meaning motor cars. Listen, Pietro, did you see any one riding a horse?"

"Yes, one, a young woman."

"How is it you remember her so distinctly?"

"She came up from behind. As she passed me she leaned over and smiled and spoke to me in my own tongue."

"A young lady?"

"Yes."

"Attired in a riding costume as became one of wealth?"

"It is all true, signor."

"And pretty too?"

"Beautiful, signor."

"That is strange. You are not a handsome man, Pietro. It is not often that a young and beautiful woman speaks to you while you drive your junk wagon?"

"It never before happened."

"And she was smiling, you say?"

"Yes."

"As though very much pleased?"

"She looked happy, signor, very happy."

"Yes," muttered Detective Jim to himself, "I don't doubt it, for at that minute Annette undoubtedly had in her possession the little wooden box holding the half million in bills that represented that four years' accumulation of the brotherhood of crooks. She must have ridden up behind the wagon and in some way reached in to snatch it out of the urn. It could be done."

He turned again to the junkman.

"Perhaps you are giving it to me straight, Pietro, or it may be you lie, and have that little box safely hidden away. So long as that big man believes so your life is not safe. If you value it you had better get away from here immediately. Even now he may be returning with other devils just as savage as himself, determined to wrest your secret from you, if torture

can accomplish it. If you are a wise man you will hide until this storm blows over."

"Signor, I would give all I possess to be able to do as you say; but it is too late," he groaned.

"Say you so? What does that sort of talk mean?"

"I fear they have already returned. Even now we are surrounded. I saw a man back of you, and another beyond him!"

The detective whirled around, knowing what it meant for him if what the other said were true.

Even as he did so, a figure was projected through space, and while he shot out his fist to meet the attack he found himself borne back under the force of the collision.

Active as a cat he attempted to whirl the other around in the fall, and actually succeeded in so doing.

Had Red Leary been alone he would have been speedily subdued; but the rest of the gang were on hand to lend assistance.

They pounced on Detective Jim like tigers, and he found himself pounded by the fists of his enemies until, thinking discretion the better part of valor, he gave over trying to hold his own.

Then he was quickly tied up again, just as securely as when they left him to the mercy of the tide and the sewer rats.

CHAPTER XII.

A DESPERATE SITUATION.

Pietro was also once more secured.

He had been too frightened to shout an alarm when he had the chance, and now it was too late.

In obedience to Harry's telephone call the balance of the gang had come with all haste to the city.

They were all present, Sim, the Penman, "Foxey" Jones and Red, making up the powerful quartette that had so long baffled justice, and mocked the efforts of the most skillful detectives to round them up; until Crawley was drawn into the game, and had succeeded in capturing the leader, only to have him escape from confinement in the astonishingly clever way we have seen.

Detective Jim saw that they were holding a grave consultation.

From words which came to his ears he decided that Harry no longer believed the Italian guilty of purloining the valuable little wooden box.

He had switched to another.

In other words, something he had heard pass between these two had given him a new idea, which might be to the effect that the police officer himself must be the one to blame.

Once convinced of this he would spare no pains to wring a confession from the man he hated so bitterly.

The fact might save Crawley's life for the time being, but it was apt to add to his agony of body and mind.

What had happened to poor Pietro would be but a circumstance to the torture the gang would inflict upon him in the endeavor to make him tell what had become of the loot taken from its hiding place in the old urn.

But while there is life there is hope.

Detective Jim was not the one to give way to despair.

His keen ears also caught some mention of a boat. He was not surprised.

For some time he had been convinced that the four associated crooks must be the adroit thieves who had been guilty of robbing many country homes along the Connecticut shore of the Sound, and who were known to have some manner of swift power boat in which they made their escape.

Now he knew it to a certainty.

Another thing he soon learned.

They meant to transfer him to that same boat without delay.

Perhaps they felt safer away from the great city.

There were too many chances of the disguise of the leader being penetrated by some keen-eyed detective.

He saw Handsome Harry hunting among the accumulated stuff such as may always be found in a junk shop.

But he was not looking for the missing treasure box now.

Presently he came back and spoke again with the others.

A box was dragged forward.

After they had made sure that the detective could not move, or even whisper, he was placed in this, and the lid lightly nailed down.

Soon after he felt himself being borne out to a wagon, into which the box was shoved.

Then came a long ride over the granite pavements, with probably one of the crooks sitting alongside the driver.

Of course the man in the box suffered tortures while being thus transported like a bale of merchandise; but his nerve never failed him.

At length the agony ended.

He felt himself being borne on board some sort of craft, as he could tell by the buoyant motion.

Voices around him told that his enemies had all arrived.

The vessel was in motion, for he could hear the rapid exhaust that indicated more or less speed.

It seemed as though hours must have passed, when finally the lid of the box was removed.

The imprisoned detective looked up into the sneering face of Handsome Harry.

"This time it will be worse than rats, Jim Crawley.

We are now on the sound. In the place where we shall put up for the night no human ears can hear your shrieks. What I did to Pietro will be tame compared to what is going to happen to you, if that box is not forthcoming."

The gag had been removed from the mouth of the detective.

He did not reply.

It would have been utterly useless to deny that he had seen the box, at this early stage of the proceedings. He would wait.

If it came to the worst then he could tell this monster that it was his own daughter who had in all probability secured possession of the prize.

They might not believe him.

And the fact of his imparting such valuable information, he well knew, would not save him from the intended torture.

For the present then his policy was silence.

All the time his eyes were on the alert for a chance to do something.

Sooner or later he was convinced that the opening must come.

Turning the box over they dumped him on the deck.

Then, while two of the men held him, Harry cut his bonds.

Detective Jim did not offer to struggle.

He knew what angering these devils might bring upon him, and the memory of that severed ear of Pietro was yet strong in his mind!

He had a glimpse of vanishing skirts in the direction of the cabin.

This told him that Annette was aboard.

Handsome Harry did not look at all happy, as might a man who had found what he had set his heart upon discovering.

Annette had not told then.

She had some reason for keeping silent.

Perhaps she was not in full sympathy with the lawless life of her father, and could not bring herself to lending her sympathy to the accumulation of the wages of sin.

She might even think seriously of trying to restore the loot to those who could prove that they had lost through the wicked schemes of her parent.

At any rate her presence added spice to the game.

Possibly, to save the life of the detective she might finally relent and convince Harry that his prisoner knew nothing about the prize.

Crawley hoped so, if things reached their lowest ebb. He looked about him.

Just as the other had said they were now upon the broad sound, and heading to the Connecticut shore.

Here were stretches where elegant residences abounded.

Then again were miles of low marshland, where no human habitation could be seen.

No wonder the thief had said that they would soon be in a place where his voice could reach no friendly ear, shout he ever so loud.

"Take a good look, Jim Crawley. It may be the very last you will ever have. No help can reach you now. Why, sooner than let you be rescued I'd cut you in pieces. When you ran up against Handsome Harry you tackled a tough proposition. You'll chase no more crooks. Your day is done!" said the chief, with a cold laugh.

Then they hustled him forward.

The power boat seemed to be built for speed first of all.

At the same time it was rather roomy, and has a hold as well as a cabin.

In fact, it could be called a yacht, since only the steersman's house was on deck.

Of course it was to the hold they dragged the detective.

As they passed the little house where Foxey Jones was handling the wheel there was a sudden series of most terrible growls, and the ugliest bulldog the detective had ever set eyes upon made a short dash toward him, showing a terrible assortment of white teeth.

A rope drew the beast up, just before he could seize hold of the prisoner's leg; but his teeth came together with a snap like a steel trap springing.

Handsome Harry laughed heartily.

"That's our pet aboard the boat, the only guard we leave when we go ashore. And Mulligan has a pedigree too. Looks like he didn't fancy you, Jim. That's bad, for to-night, when we tie up, it was my intention to have him occupy quarters with you in the hold. You found a way to win out against the rats; wonder if you will be as successful against the prize beauty! But Jim, when he takes hold death alone will make him leave go!"

Crawley tried to look unconcerned; but the memory of those horrible teeth, and the fiendish look on the black face of the massive bulldog with the square shoulders haunted him.

He knew what such a beast could accomplish, and that once he had locked those iron jaws upon the throat of a bull the animal was bound to be finally slain.

The prospect was far from pleasing.

Handsome Harry thrust his face close to that of his prisoner and smiled, even while he gritted his teeth.

His hatred for the man who had landed him behind the bars was beyond words.

Perhaps he even meant that the brute should finish Detective Jim.

Perhaps it might happen that he had an idea he knew just where the treasure-trove could be found; and that he had carried the detective away on the boat simply in order to glut his desire for revenge.

And since he had been again thoroughly searched Crawley did not have even so much as a pen knife on

his person, with which to meet the savage attack of that powerful brute.

They thrust him below.

He heard the hatch being barricaded, so that no effort on his part might upset the plans of his foe.

Then the minutes dragged by, and he knew the day was passing.

What would the coming of night mean for him?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BULLDOG GRIP THAT NEVER LET GO.

It was pitch dark down in the hold.

Only the eyes of a cat could have distinguished anything about him, and Crawley made no claim to possessing such optics.

Still, after a while, when he had recovered his breath, and began to look about him, his attention was attracted by light that seemed to enter at one end of the hold.

Groping his way over he found that there was a crevice of some sort, and when he applied his eye it was to learn that the cabin was close by—in fact that he was even then looking into it.

He had no sooner noted this circumstance than he became aware that there was something tapping upon the partition.

Instantly he guessed what this meant.

It was the girl, Annette!

She desired to communicate with him for a purpose. He tapped back.

Then he knew some one was moving close to him on the other side of that barrier, and close to the crack.

"Are you there, Mr. Crawley?" came in a whisper.

He knew now his suspicions were confirmed, and that it was the girl.

"Yes, at this crack. Is that you, Annette?" he asked, quickly.

"I am alone in the cabin, but one of them may come in here at any minute. I wish to save you if I can. They intend to turn that terrible dog loose in the hold at any minute now," she said, in trembling tones.

"But why does Harry wish to kill me, when he thinks I hold the secret of the treasure?"

"He does not think so now. He knows that I took the box, and have hidden it away. I refused to tell him where it is. He believes that if he tortures you I will be unable to hold out any longer. To save a human life I must give in. That is why they mean to let Mulligan in on you. Every second that you are fighting him for your life he will be watching me to see if I

weaken. Should I give in they will rush in and try and save you, even though it be too late."

"You are kind to tell me all this pleasant news. But I would thank you still more if you could manage to push me a revolver through this crack."

"I cannot do that, for there is none here. The best I can do for you, sir, is to give you this knife."

Eagerly he clutched the blade she shoved through the crack.

It might be his very life would depend upon that carver.

"Look again and see if you couldn't find a bit of candle and a few matches. It is horribly dark in here. A man would feel better to meet that beast openly, and see what he was doing. Try and get them for me, miss," he pleaded.

"I can do that. There is a box of candles close to my hand, and plenty of matches. Here, take this, and this. Oh! do you think you will win out with that terrible monster? He can pull down an ox, they said."

"I'll give him a run for the money. But even if I get the better of him it is only delaying the vengeance of your father, girl."

"He is not my father. I have learned the truth by accident, and that he is really my uncle. That is why I have taken my stand against him. I do not know what he may do to me if I persist. He is a wicked man, and would stop at nothing. Silence, now, I believe one of them is coming down here! God be with you, sir."

The whispering ceased.

But Detective Jim felt that his case was no longer hopeless.

Fortune had raised him up a friend just when affairs looked blackest.

With that trusty knife he might yet hack his way to freedom.

Some men would have shuddered at the prospect ahead, but he did nothing of the sort, simply getting himself in readiness for the anticipated rush of the massive bulldog, when they thrust him into the hold.

He believed the yacht had been tied up alongside some desolate place, and that in all probability evening was at hand, for it had been the light of a lamp that he had seen through that crack in the partition.

First of all he arranged one of the candles so that it could be lighted at the first sign of danger.

Then he wrapped his coat around his left arm *below the elbow!*

He had seen gladiators meet the attack of a furious beast this way, and knew that in the case of a bulldog it was the finest move possible.

Once the iron jaws of Mulligan closed over that protected arm nothing but death could make him let go.

This would give the detective a splendid opportunity to be using the long bladed carving knife to advantage. Grimly he waited.

The pulsations of his heart told how the seconds were passing.

In fact, he hoped there would be little delay, for the sooner this ghastly encounter were over with the better.

His acute hearing caught a sound at last other than the shuffling of feet over the deck above.

Some one was at the hatch!

Apparently the critical moment had come!

He drew a quick breath, and prepared to strike his match.

Purposely he had taken up a position at a distance from the opening.

This was to give him a second or two to prepare before the hurricane of snapping teeth and tough muscle was upon him.

The very instant he saw the hatch raised and something thrown down he hastily drew the match along the leg of his trousers, and as the flame sprang up applied it to the waiting wick of the candle.

Then he whipped around to meet the whirlwind.

The candle was a good one, and while its light might have seemed dim compared to the glow of an electric bulb it was brilliant to the eyes of one shut in darkness for an hour or more.

And what Crawley saw was enough to nerve any man to desperation.

The bulldog with a long pedigree was shooting through space like a comet.

His ugly square head was lowered, his massive jaws set, and his blazing eyes fastened upon the object of his wrath.

He looked like a devil more than any other thing on earth.

Detective Jim knelt to receive him.

He even thrust out his left arm as if inviting an attack.

That was something which a beast of Mulligan's nature never disdained, and his enormous jaws opened and closed over the arm like a bear trap suddenly sprung.

Then something happened on the part of the man.

He began working his good right arm back and forward like a pump handle.

Each time he thrust there was a savage growl from the dog, accompanied by a quiver of his body.

No wonder, when that carving knife was plunging into his side, urged on by every atom of strength in the detective's body.

As he growled fiercely the animal was chewing at the arm he gripped.

It was only a question of time when his sharp teeth must pierce through the several thicknesses of coat, and grind into the flesh of the man.

Once Jim was sure he heard what seemed to be a shriek behind him.

It was a female voice too.

Perhaps Annette, unable to resist the awful fascination that impelled her to peep through the crack in the board wall, was a witness of the terrible sight.

Harder still he thrust that rapier-like weapon forward.

Did this monster possess the nine lives of a cat? Would he never yield?

In all his experiences Crawley had never run up against such a situation as this.

He knew that animals of Mulligan's breed were looked upon as terrible fighters, but he had never supposed one could stand such punishment as he was handing out when he thrust that long-bladed knife repeatedly six inches and more into the side of his antagonist.

Even his muscular arm began to grow weary of its labor, though he dared not slacken those strokes one atom.

At last he noticed a decided diminution of the savage growling.

The beast was weakening.

Even such a devilish creature could not eternally stand the fearful loss of life fluid as must have drained from those reeking wounds given by that keen-edged blade.

This nerved his arm as nothing else would.

Still Mulligan would not let go.

Growling and biting he passed off, until he hung there, a dead weight upon the arm of the half exhausted detective.

But Crawley knew that he must not give way now. His peril was still extremely great.

When the sounds of deadly combat ceased those who were listening eagerly up on deck would be likely to attempt to descend.

He must frustrate this move.

Should they succeed in entering the hold he would be as putty in their hands, since they were four to one, and every man undoubtedly carried a gun besides.

First of all he must get rid of the burden that hung to him even in death.

It was no easy task, for those iron jaws had been set, and all of his power was required, with the assistance of the knife, to tear them loose.

Then, bloody knife in hand he rushed over to the spot where the hatch lay, first of all blowing out his candle, for he did not wish to make a target of himself for the revolvers of those villains above.

He was just in time.

The hatch had been raised, and a man was in the act of descending.

He held a lighted lantern in his hand, and possibly carried a gun in the other, not knowing what the bulldog might do, once aroused by a taste of blood.

For of course it was a foregone conclusion in their minds that Mulligan had come out of the encounter a victor.

Detective Jim acted promptly.

With his knife he smashed the glass of the lantern at a single blow.

Then he gave the nearest leg of the man a gash that started him howling at a vigorous rate, possibly under the impression that he owed this attack to the dog.

The way he scrambled up out of that opening was ludicrous.

Crawley had gained by the passage, however.

Something rattled down at his feet as Red Leary bounded back to the deck.

It was the man's gun, which had slipped from his grip in his haste to get up beyond reach of those terrible jaws of Mulligan.

When his groping hand clutched this weapon Crawley felt like shouting aloud, so great was his relief.

He knew now that he would win out!

Things had begun to come his way.

But for the compassion of Annette, and her handling him that fine knife through the crack, these things could never have come about, and the chances were he must have ere now fallen a victim to the terrible brute turned in upon him.

Having secured the revolver he moved back a pace, anticipating that his foes would be apt to learn that it was a knife and not the jaws of the dog that had inflicted the wound in Red's leg, and might begin to shoot down into the darkness.

Just as he figured it came about.

Fortunately he was able to keep beyond range of the flying lead, since none of those on deck dared to lean down and thrust an arm into the hold.

Red had warned them of his weapon dropping when he made that upward leap; and they knew the ability of Detective Jim to use a gun.

Presently the fusillade ceased.

The hatch was closed down as though the four villains had some other scheme in view for accomplishing his discomfiture.

He heard them barricading it again.

What would they try next?

Did they have another Mulligan to send after him, or would they resort to some desperate expedient originated by that clever leader, Handsome Harry?

He could afford to wait.

It was their move.

No matter what came, he felt as though he could meet it better, now that he had reliable weapons in his hands.

And the girl was on his side too, he must not forget that fact.

A voice hailed him.

Handsome Harry was at the hatch, which had been raised a trifle to let him talk.

Wondering what new scheme was in the wind the detective made his way over until he could hear what was said.

But at the same time he was cautious enough to place himself behind a bale of some goods he happened to run across in the hold—stolen perhaps by the looters.

CHAPTER XIV.

TNE BITERS BITTEN.

"Hello! Crawley!"

"Well, what do you want?"

"You're a wonder, all right. Have you killed that demon, Mulligan, man?"

"Sure. What else did you expect? It was his life or mine. I told you I would be your Nemesis, Harry, and I mean to. I'm going to land you back again behind the bars, and every one of your gang with you."

A hoarse laugh greeted this bold assertion; but plainly the big crook was disturbed.

"You're a nervy one, all right, Jim. I'll give you credit for that. But at the same time I've sworn to down you if I have to fire this boat and roast you alive."

"I guess you won't do that, Harry."

"What makes you so cock sure I won't?"

"A certain little wooden box, that's all."

The other swore roundly.

"Say, what do you mean by that, you cat with nine lives?" he shouted.

"Why, only that you don't want to burn that up, Harry."

"You haven't got it, curse you—didn't we search you over and over?"

"But I may know where it's hidden away, and perhaps I could put my hand on it right now if I wanted!"

This was of course a clever move on the part of the detective to baffle the desperate design of the crook; if he could be brought to even half suspect that Annette had hidden the loot down there in the hold, and that Crawley knew about it, he certainly would never dream of carrying his threat of burning the yacht into execution.

There was some angry talk on deck.

Perhaps Harry's comrades were reproaching him for allowing his secret to fall into the possession of the girl.

She had never shown any interest in their way of making a living; indeed, no doubt she had even tried to induce Harry to abandon it many times.

What more reasonable than to believe Annette had turned upon them, and allied herself with the enemy.

Did not the fact of the detective possessing a knife with which he had slain the ferocious bulldog prove such an alliance?

Then a hand was quickly inserted in the opening, and several shots fired in rapid succession.

It was the artful Foxey who was doing this gunplay. He had noted the direction of the detective's voice, and hoped to down him by a lucky shot.

That bale of stolen goods afforded Crawley all the protection he wanted.

He seized the opportunity presented to take a snapshot himself at the exposed arm of the crook; and a yell of pain announced that as usual his aim was perfection.

After that the hatch went down.

And they barricaded it again, as though fearful lest he even take a notion to leap out on deck and defy them face to face.

By this time the baffled plotters forming the league of crime had begun to actually believe some mysterious power surrounded the man upon their trail.

Nothing seemed to be able to accomplish his death.

They had tried water and fire, they had left him to the mercy of a horde of hungry sewer rats, they had even thrown a very devil of a beast at him, unarmed as he was supposed to be at the time.

He had risen superior to all these things, and even now laughed at the threats of their leader, boldly telling him that he meant to take him back again to the cell from which he had escaped through trickery without parallel.

After a while the detective heard the sound of crunching wood near by.

He easily guessed what they were doing—indeed, he had himself even thought of trying to cut his way out through that cabin wall by means of the friendly knife.

But with the aid of his candle he had made a discovery that discounted this.

Further along there was a loose board which he could easily remove.

This gave into a store room or lazarette, where boxes and packages of food were kept in stock for a hurry trip; for these lawless men never knew when the chase might suddenly grow so hot that they would have to make a run for it out to sea.

Crawley had prepared against trouble by removing this board and another, when he had a passage secured through which he could make a hasty exit.

He had even gone through to see if the door of the larder were locked, and to his relief discovered that this was not the case, although the key chanced to be present, ready for business.

Now the men, growing impatient, were kicking in the partition back of the cabin.

They must have become reckless, and determined to push matters to a climax.

If they could only succeed in closing with the detec-

tive, their overpowering numbers must prevail.

The loud and angry voice of Handsome Harry cheered them on.

Crawley thought it was about time to make a sneak.

He crept through into the lazarette, reached the door, passed it, turning the key in the lock, and slipping it in his pocket, and then kept on in the direction of the cabin.

It was just as he had expected.

In fact, he had gauged his time to a second; for even as he came to the cabin door he saw the men in the act of leaping through the opening they had made.

Three of them carried guns, while Red was armed with a hatchet, so that they made a very warlike appearance.

Crawley had extinguished his candle before he left the hold.

Consequently the four desperate men could not make sure that he was not waiting to receive them with a hot fire.

Even though they looked as best they might, with the aid of the lantern carried by the leader, it would be supposed that Detective Jim was crouching back of a bale or a box, too artful to expose himself to their fire.

He saw the last of them shoot through the hole, this being the limping Red, wildly waving his hatchet with all the vim of an Indian warrior.

Then Crawley doubled over in a fit of silent laughter. How beautifully they had played into his hands.

It was now a case of the shoe on the other foot.

They were in the hold, and he held the breech, daring any one to as much as show a head.

He looked around the cabin or saloon of the boat.

What he wanted was some object bulky enough to cover that gap in the wall.

The only thing that seemed capable of answering the purpose was the buffet that stood against the wall close by.

He made a jump for it, and never paying the slightest heed to the shower of glass that flew in every direction he whirled the heavy piece of furniture about so that its back was directly across the hole.

Several shots rang out.

The four worthies in the hold had by now smelled a rat.

Seeing no signs of the man they had sworn to destroy, and discovering the other hole leading into the lazarette, Handsome Harry realized that once again had the cunning of the man-tracker been too much for them.

As he started to retrace his steps it was only to see the hole in the wall suddenly vanish, when the side-board was wheeled across it.

Then in his anger he started to send shot after shot around the novel barrier brought into use by the detective.

It was his hope that one of these random bullets might happen to hit Crawley, and put him out of business.

Those of his companions possessing pistols followed suit.

For the space of a minute one might have thought a mimic battle was in progress aboard that tied-up yacht.

So engrossed were the men in their work, and such was the expectation they entertained of winging the foe, that none of them thought of halting until the snapping of hammers on bare shells told that their weapons were empty.

The man on the other side of the wall guessed what the state of affairs must be when finally a last shot announced the end of the fusillade.

He laughed aloud.

Let the four comrades pound their heels against the walls of the hold, or beat their fists against the hatch.

They were in a trap!

It was the detective's hour of triumph.

Still, he had to be very careful lest some hitch occur.

So long as those rascals had their hands free they were to be feared.

He must engineer things now with a view of finishing his work.

"Annette!" he called.

The door of a stateroom close by quivered.

Then a head was thrust forth, the head of a pretty young woman.

There was fear upon her face now, for she had heard those shots, and supposed they meant that her uncle and his allies must have finally killed this brave detective who had defied them so long.

At sight of Crawley standing there, pistol in hand she cried out.

"Then they did not get you?"

"Apparently not. On the contrary, I have the whole outfit corralled in the hold, and with empty weapons. One by one I mean to take them out of there—and you shall assist me. I happen to be a deputy sheriff of a New York county, and I appoint you as my assistant."

She continued to gaze upon him with admiration.

"You are the most wonderful man I ever met, Mr. Crawley," she said.

"Thanks for the compliment. Will you help me?"

"Yes, my mind is made up. After seeing what a fiend my uncle can be I shall not try to shield him any longer. In fact, I believe it is far better that he should be locked up in jail than allowed to roam the world, for sooner or later he would be doing murder. I will do anything you say, sir."

The detective smiled, for he had reason to believe Handsome Harry's hand could not be free from the stain of blood.

CHAPTER XV.

SMOKED OUT—CONCLUSION.

He knew he could trust her.

What she had learned of late in connection with the evil ways of her uncle had thoroughly disgusted the girl.

That was one reason she had hidden the big loot where it could not be found.

"Is that a charcoal furnace over there?" he asked, pointing.

"Yes, used sometimes in connection with the cooking."

"There is plenty of fuel handy—charcoal, I mean?"

"Oh! yes, sir."

"Show me where, please."

She led him to the corner of the cook's galley just alongside the cabin, where in a box he found what he sought.

Quickly he started a fire going in the little iron pot.

Feeding this with chips which had resulted from the savage attack upon the wooden partition when that hatchet handled by Red had started to work, he presently had a blaze that would take hold of the black fuel.

Then he began working a small bellows he had found near by.

All the while Annette watched him curiously, with deep admiration in her eyes.

Nor could the detective fail to observe that she stood close to the sideboard, as though ready and willing to throw her slight weight against it in case the prisoners of the hold tried to topple it over.

"There, that will do, I think."

He shoved the little furnace close to the place where the gap in the wall had been made by the furious quartette.

They were quiet within, and apparently investigating in order to see whether there might not be some means of escape through the lazarette.

Crawley began to deliberately use the bellows.

He kept plenty of charcoal upon the top, and this of course created an abundance of noxious gas which the current of air from the bellows forced into the hold.

In five minutes the atmosphere down there would be getting foul.

In ten it would have reached a stage where men would cough and choke.

When fifteen had crept by they would find themselves perilously near the point of suffocation.

Annette comprehended what his scheme was.

He meant to force the enemy to capitulate.

To enter the hold while they were in their present state of mind would be next to madness.

They would certainly attack him like so many wild-cats, despite the fact that he possessed a revolver

while their weapons were useless so far as shooting qualities went.

Brave to a fault, Detective Jim could be cautious at the same time.

He believed he had the game safely in his hands, if he managed to play his cards properly.

Presently the sound of loud voices was heard.

"Hello! Crawley!" called the chief.

"Well."

"What in the devil are you trying to do, smother us all?"

"Something along that line. It will be an easy death beside what you had laid out for me. Beautiful dreams will pass before your minds. You will think you are in a Paradise. Take things philosophically, boys. It will soon be over."

Harry swore roundly, and made a dash as if to overthrow the little furnace if he could only get at it.

A shot from Crawley's revolver sent him back with bitter words, for he had felt the sting of the bullet along his flesh.

More minutes passed.

By this time the coughing had ceased.

"Are they dead?" asked the girl, in an awed voice, her eyes staring at Crawley.

He shook his head, and smiled.

"Not a bit of it, only getting rather hazy. Here comes one of them now. Hello! is that you, Sim?" recognizing the voice that called out.

"Yes, I surrender. Let me out of this choking hell! Crawley. I'm nearly all in!"

"All right. Wait till I push the buffet aside. If any others try to rush me I shall shoot to kill. You hear?"

When he had pushed the barrier partly aside a forlorn figure came squeezing up through the little opening, panting for a breath of pure air.

At the detective's nod the girl pushed hard against the buffet and managed to slide it back over the hole again.

Meanwhile, in a jiffy, he had thrown some cords around the wrists of Sim, and was then ready for the next.

Already a voice was appealing for mercy.

Foxy Jones came in sight when the gap opened again, and he was treated in the same manner.

This left only Red and the leader.

Crawley was dead sure Handsome Harry would hold out to the end.

Hence, when again a weak voice asked for a chance to breathe he knew that the game fighter Leary had thrown up the sponge.

Liberty was all very well, but life came first.

He took occasion to also fasten the ankles of Red and then noted the fact that Foxy had vanished.

"He rolled out of the door," explained Annette.

Still Handsome Harry refused to give in, and afraid

lest the stubborn rascal actually perish the detective finally jumped into the hold.

He was immediately seized by the desperate ruffian; who had anticipated such a move on his part.

Being too weak to offer much resistance however, the chief of the league of crime was summarily handled, and pushed up through the opening to where he could secure a breath of air.

Here he quickly found himself bound hand and foot.

Foxy could not be found.

He had either jumped ashore with his hands bound, and wandered off; or else found some means of freeing his wrists before departing.

But he was gone beyond all doubt.

This marred the detective's full measure of triumph, and yet he could hardly complain, after he ran the motor yacht back to the city, and handed over his three prisoners to the authorities.

Great was the amazement of the prison officials at receiving the man they positively believed to be dead, and whose body they had given over to one claiming to be his wife.

This time the villains received their full terms, and at this date are working for the State in Sing Sing.

Annette did actually have the little wooden box hidden on the boat.

She produced it, and acting in conjunction with the detective found means to return a portion of the great loot to those whom the gang had robbed.

One half of the treasure could not be given back, and this Detective Jim insisted upon Annette keeping for her future maintenance; though she declared she would never be happy without earning her own living, and proceeded to start a millinery shop in Fifth Avenue from which she has ever since secured an independent income.

She still believes Detective Jim to be the bravest and cleverest hero living; and if the gallant officer were a marrying man there might be some reason to believe that some day these two good friends might become closer to each other than now.

Pietro was found in his junkshop by the detective, still bound and almost dead from terror. He proved a valuable witness in the trail of the notorious "Big Four." Needless to say Pietro wears his hair long these days, in order to hide his disfiguration; and he never meets a lady on horseback but what he resolutely turns his head the other way, and shudders to remember what followed on that other occasion.

The league of four was broken up when the chief and two of his followers were sent up the river for long terms.

Foxy Jones gave New York a wide berth.

He always maintained that he feared but one person on earth, and that was Crawley, the man-tracker.

THE END.

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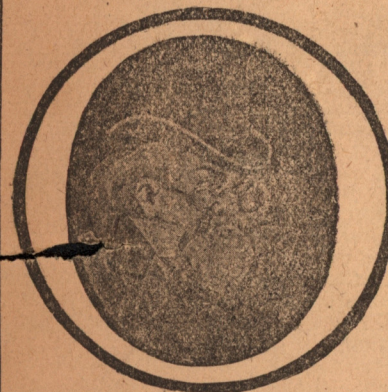
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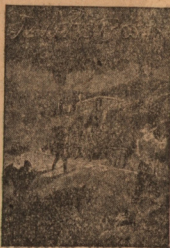


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